UNDER THE SYRIAN SUN

A.C. INCHBOLD

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UNDER THE SYRIAN SUN

VOL. II

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THE TOWER OF DAVID, MOUNT ZION.

UNDER THE SYRIAN SUN

THE LEBANON, BAALBEK GALILEE, AND JUDÆA

By A. C. INCHBOLD

Author of
"Phantasma," "Princess Feather," "The Silver Dove," etc.

WITH 40 FULL-PAGE COLOURED PLATES
AND 8 BLACK-AND-WHITE DRAWINGS
BY
STANLEY INCHBOLD

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UNDER THE SYRIAN SUN

CHAPTER XX

THE SEA OF GALILEE—LIGHT AND SHADOW

TO watch the various aspects of the lake from the terraced roof outside our room was an endless and never-tiring interest. I watched it early and watched it late, and lingered there when the moon was out. The weather was unsettled though warm and genial, and the changes, continually transforming the colour of the water and the appearance of the hills around, were countless.

The form of the lake is familiar to every one as pear-shaped, the broad expanse curving round to the north where the Jordan flows into the sea, the shores approaching each other towards the southern end. Tiberias, placed at the edge of the water more than half-way down the western shore, commanded views from any prominent position of the reputed sites of Chorazin, Capernaum, and Bethsaida on the northern coasts of the lake. The

background of hills above them vanished into clouds, hiding persistently from view the sight of Hermon, which, from hearsay I knew, shone like crystal in the sun, when the snows of winter were still glistening in its crevices.

As I turned to look across at the eastern hill, suddenly from the south-end of the lake came a vapoury shower, blotting them from view though revealing the white surface of the water as through a gauzy veil. It vanished, leaving clear and limpid a vast expanse of mellow green, stretching across from the opposite hill-coast to the border of weather-worn purple and grey walls, roofs, and porches of Tiberias abutting on this shore. Then in a moment right across the green a passing cloud flung a broad purple shadow, which fled as if pursued to the eastern boundary, adding a deeper tone to the flat hill-wall.

A sudden breeze played over the surface, rumpling it, and causing the green to be shot with blue, glancing and glittering, first one hue then the other predominant. The water-line appeared to touch the edge of the terrace as the gleaming wing of a gull flitted across. A few yards away from this delusive water-line rocked a solitary boat, moving and twisting with the current and breeze, now pointing inland, now broad-sides to shore.

Slowly under the hill yonder evolved a silvery turquoise streak widening as it grew, and beneath it a line of royal purple, while the remainder of the lake was one vast rippling sheet of pallid olive-green. And now the southern hills had become the colour of deep indigo,

their heights overhung with lurid thunder-clouds. The air was singularly heavy and warm except when a sudden zephyr sprang up, played on the cheek, and died as quickly as it had appeared. One began to realise that this fascinating prospect was situated in an unique position, that there was something even weird in the recollection of the six hundred and eighty feet that it lay beneath the level of the sea. A voice dispelled the feeling of unreality conjured up by this thought.

"Hasmeh!" came in the loud tones of a youth from a house close by, which had a stone staircase descending to the court, while on the upper story was a stone-arched gallery with windows and doors opening upon it. "Hasmeh!" called again the tall young Moslem in a bright-striped kumbaz standing at the head of the steps.

Another youth in a white turban came out and caught him by the arm, dragging him back into the house just as a young girl garbed in white, and holding her veil across the lower part of her face, came out of one door of the balcony, passed them with averted head, and entered another door lower down.

Looking to the right, clear down below the parapet, was a garden planted out with cabbages, a high stack of wood fuel, a big bird-cage on one of many upturned barrels. Over the high wall of the garden a tamarisk-tree rose, stretching out large feathery branches, brown-tipped through sun and scorching winds, against the blue of the water, the deep purple of the hills, and soft background of clouds above them.

Beyond the horizontal garden-wall a stretch of the town rampart ran out into the sea enclosing in the angle between a deep, dark corner of the water. To the right beyond these, one behind the other, small, big, square, or oblong, stretched the flat roofs of the town, in a colour-scheme of greys, browns, white, and chrome, their outlines broken up by tufts of grass, sprigs of hyssop, golden-brown lichen, small tamarisk branches, here a palm, and there a palm, and on a few of the terraces a leafy booth or arbour.

It was the Jews' Sabbath. The clock struck a clear-toned indication of the quarter, and then the nine strokes of the hour. On a distant gallery, beneath pillared arches, young Jews in their long coats and tarbooshes were collecting as though for instruction. The Jews in Tiberias! What a strange anomaly seemed the fact. In the days of its early prosperity, not one would enter the town, for the foundations were constructed on a burying-ground, so ancient that the whole surroundings were overgrown with reeds, that is supposed to have been the cemetery of a city lying somewhat to the south, in ruins even at the time of the building of Tiberias, A.D. 22. The site, implying Levitical uncleanness to the conscientious Jews, deterred them from settling there at all for some time, and it was not until after the downfall of Jerusalem that it became not only one of the four holy cities, but also the chief seat of Talmudic learning. In the days of Christ it was peopled chiefly by adventurers, who were given special advantages under the rule of Herod Antipas, the builder of the city, which

was the most extensive of similar undertakings constructed in his reign of forty-three years over Galilee and Peræa. It is probable that Tiberias was never once entered by Christ, a fact which appears to explain the silence of the evangelists concerning one of the most opulent cities on the lake shores.

The castle was situated on the highest ground of the northern end of the town. It must have extended over a large area, judging from the condition of the ruins. At the corners were massive round towers or bastions, overgrown with grass and weeds; everywhere were débris and the jagged ridges of dilapidated walls. A wild nettle and thistle-overgrown path wound through the broken archways, in between and round the walls in which were the blank window outlets some twenty feet above the ground. That part of the ruined palace which had been converted into the serai was roofed with Moslem cupolas, their blue and white colouring glistening like veined marble in the framework of dark basalt grass-grown walls and débris.

Upon investigation of another portion of the spacious area, we saw apertures in the walls covered with old mattings and canvas, and an entrance barred by a rude, wooden door. Within dwelt a party of fierce-looking Metawilehs, who never allowed their women to walk out except at night; they were then allowed to promenade in the walled enclosure of the castle, or to roam at moonlight, like the figures of fallen angels, on the heights of the massive walls or upon the bastions. There was a curious fitness in this small settlement of Metawilehs

among the Jews of Tiberias, for in physiognomy they much resemble the Jews, even to the wearing of the hair, with the peculiar side-locks in some instances. The laws of ceremonial defilement through touching or using articles belonging to other races, as alluded to in an earlier passage, also bring their religious regulations into comparison with the strict Levitical code.

In the ruins and without was a prolific vegetation of weeds, thistles, yellow mustard, and also anemones. Along the slope, beyond and below which overlooked the lake, débris was embedded in the soil. One huge conglomerate block stood on end like a square pillar. The stones were chiefly basalt, with here and there broken débris of granite, and a quantity of the grey rocks and stones which lie scattered on the whole shore. Horses were tethered here and there. On the walls above, a sentry was on guard walking on the rampart and fallen tower looking down upon the barracks. Below were some olive-trees, and spread around them a broad sward of long thick grass.

Then we walked northward, keeping by the shore, passing some Arabs who stood knee-deep in the water washing their horses, white and brown. The track might have bordered the margin of an English lake, so blue and mirror-like the smooth surface of the water, so softly green the shadowed indentations of the opposite hills of Gaulanitis, but then round a bend of the path would come springing with his customary, aggressive and proud gait, a wild-looking Bedawi, with swinging abbai and dark muffled head, or an ordinary peasant

The Lake of Tiberius.

of the vicinity bearing fuel or produce of the field. There was a simple, sylvan aspect about the winding path bordered with wild, luxuriant flowers, the pebbly strand, the clear transparent water, the oleander bushes showing their roses, tenderly pink, in the green foliage of its boughs. High to the left, far up on the hills, was Safed, "the city on a hill," never hidden from view. But Hermon, the "collector of clouds," still veiled itself behind a barrier of cloud and mist.

A road at the back of the town continued southward, bending with the deep curve of the shore as far as the famous Hot Baths. Scattered by the roadside and along the slope were many fragments of that ancient city which once spread over the plain and mountain-side between Tiberias and the baths ; the city to which even the most erudite researchers have been unable to give any but a conjectural name, though they state that it may have been Chinneroth, the city from which the lake took its oldest appellation. It must have contained splendid temples, palaces, and fine buildings of every description, if one may form an opinion from the débris of massive construction, the broken granite columns, the great stones laid bare in many places where the bank had given way, the black basalt vestiges, the relics of an aqueduct conducting towards a plateau beneath the hill, supposed to have been the site of a famous palace of Herod's at a later date.

The bath-houses lay on a flat, somewhat elevated site ; they were flat-roofed, of comparatively modern construction—for even the marble baths erected by

Ibrahim Pasha have been restored—painted chrome with blue lattice shutters. On the shelving ground mounting behind were again great débris of blocks and stones. Other buildings clustered near the site of the Baths. There was a yellow-toned synagogue with its bunch of white domes; this belonged to the Sephardim, or Jews hailing from the Spanish Peninsula as far back as their expulsion in the reign of Isabella I.; the present generation still speak a kind of Spanish patois. Then came the school-house of the Ashkenazim, or Jews from Russia and Central Europe, who speak Yiddish. The tomb with its white domes, and a solid square of masonry, surmounted by a large depressed cupola of greystone, were the sepulchres of Rabbi Meir, a famous Talmudist, and two of his pupils.

The steam and hot fumes striking one in the face and almost depriving one of breath upon first entrance caused me to beat a hasty retreat without testing the virtues of the warm mineral springs within private or public bath-houses. To recover, before taking the road back to the town, I took my seat on the rocks below. On a little projecting point about two hundred yards away were beautiful thickets of oleander in bloom. The water placidly lapping the pebbly beach was blue as a topaz, while the bosom of the lake was streaked with grey and purple. The steep cliffs opposite upon which once stood the famous Gamala were of a dull grey, nearly black, with green patches of sunlight at their base. Great cloud-shadows were flung over the low, rolling hills on the west.

Still Hermon veiled itself in mystery. Had I not seen its snowy summit bow-shaped against a pale-blue sky from the top of Carmel, I should even have doubted that it could be seen from the shores of the lake. It was doubly tantalising to have heard and read, that from no other point of view could it be seen in such perfection of beauty as on the lake shore.

The goats of the hilly pastures round Tiberias were collected by their hundreds in detached flocks as we came back to the town gates. In great purple-black clusters they were herded together to be milked, while troops of children and adults in every variety of gay-coloured garb were hastening with their bowls and pitchers to fetch away the creamy beverage, white as nectar to the eye. Groups of Arabs were sitting in rings among the flowers by the wayside. Jewish youths, in their long silk or woollen coats flapping about their heels, were walking in rows beneath the walls. Solitary students book in hand were strolling by the sea murmuring passages from the Talmud or Mishna half aloud. The women wore a long enveloping mantle, not similar to any I had seen in other parts of Palestine, white with wide horizontal stripes of a bright blue, yellow, or other vivid colour; it was drawn over their heads, and draped their figure with graceful folds. The whole town would be better appreciated when viewed from the exterior of the walls, or from a high roof terrace, though neither the streets nor the people appeared of the same hopelessly ill-conditioned aspect that writers and travellers have led one to suppose.

There seems to have been a perceptible movement for the better in Tiberias. Who may not say that the good deeds and self-effacement of the valiant workers, through summer heat as in winter-time, ever actively employed behind the walls of the big hospital standing just below the serai, have not been a notable motive power in this movement? Of mission work *per se* this book does not pretend to discourse, but this much it will state, that wherever the Franghi "hakim"—with his good right-hand, the nurse—has planted his medicine-chest and made a magic wand of his surgical knowledge, there have the leaves of healing and the leaven of civilisation worked in viewless ways among the ignorant, down-trodden, and poverty-stricken, only perceptible perhaps in after-results when the patient workers themselves have through strain or death been forced to quit the flint-strewn path of daily renunciations.

* * * * *

It was night-time in Tiberias. I stood alone on the monastery terrace above the silent lake. The moon appeared pale but perfect in contour over the western hills. As it rose in the sky its hue intensified to a shining yellow—the pure yellow of the primrose. Right across the mystery of the limpid waters stretched a graded bridge of the reflected light, narrowing as it approached the sombre line of the roofs of the town.

Here and there in the massed houses glimmered a lamp-light, while some of the roofs glistened as if sprinkled with snow. The hill behind Herod's old palace was dark and menacing. The sky grew so infused

with the silvery light that the stars were invisible except near the horizon. Standing out against the water rose the black stems of the palm-trees, their fan-like branches in clear, dark silhouette. Two others hidden between the roofs were profiled from base to plumed crest on the surface of the lake. There was not a ripple on the water, which was steel-grey with pale yellow reflected, making it of a silvery texture.

Moonlight over the Sea of Galilee! A light that effaced all that was alien to the associations with which memory and heart had clothed this spot. A light that radiated love, and the peace that surpasseth knowledge. How many a pilgrim to this same monastery had stood here and watched the moon rise over the hills that barred out the mysterious east, the hills behind which waved the wheat-fields of the Hauran, the hills that like giant walls shut out the fair prospects of the land of Gilead which "satisfy the soul."

Just here, on this same quiet roof edging the water, the poor soul who was drowned in the lake may have held vigil on just such a moonlight night as this. She had come to Tiberias, one of a party of pilgrims who had stayed at this Latin hospice. She was missed from among them and searched for in vain. In a few days the waters restored the lifeless body to the land. Over her heart was found an iron cross, big as the palm of the hand, with spikes beneath it pressing into the flesh.

She had been in sore trouble of mind: so much was revealed later. She had given her property to the ruling powers of her Church, yet had the giving up of all she

possessed failed to bring rest to her soul, or the happiness that waits upon the abnegation of self and its interests. So much was testified to by the secret laid bare of the hidden cross of iron.

If she had stood there looking out over the weird yet peaceful lake, surely the whole significance of that moon-swept scene must have penetrated to the core of her being. "Is there no balm in Gilead?" must have carried the voice of the heart across to those silent hills. The bright moon had shone as now on the waters, with its bridge of silvery reflected light stretching right to the terrace-edge. And, as she had watched it, possibly there flashed into her mind, with the electric touch of the sign from heaven, recollection of that wonderful night, nearly two thousand years back, when a boat was in peril out there on the water.

That night, too, had been a spring night, perhaps like this, with moonbeams playing over the water. A breeze had sprung up, one of those strong breezes that swoop down without warning through the mountain gorges even when the sky is perfectly clear, and the boatmen, unable to gain one shore, were labouring in vain to make for the other. Helplessly to and fro had rocked the boat, powerless to retreat or advance, when all at once in their dire strait the boatmen had looked back on the track behind, and behold! a figure stood on the waves.

"Be of good cheer; it is I, be not afraid!" said a voice.

Did the woman hear those same words echoing far out on the wide waste of waters? Did she visualise the

Sea of Galilee and Mount Hermon.

whole scene of that night of long ago so vividly that it seemed to be enacting itself again before her eyes? Just as the boatmen must have gazed fixedly, intently, upon the form which moved with the rolling waters silently upon their track, did her eyes grow fixed, as those which watch something that is a wonder to look upon? And if so, may she not have paced forward, as if to verify by nearer view the vision that held eyes and heart magnetised—the vision which seemed to hold in its beatific aspect of peace, and a perfect security, the only antidote to the failure of life?

And then . . . was it an accident, the unconscious action of the visionary or somnambulist, that followed? The true answer to that question awaits on the other shore, which she surely desired to reach when she stepped out upon that bridge of silvery moonrays.

Yet as I stood there in the moonlight, knowing the strange phantasma apt to fasten upon a woman's soul and brain, it seemed that somewhat in the way I have described was to be found the only true solution of the mystery overhanging the sad pilgrim's fate.

Kyrie eleison!
Christe eleison!

* * * * *

Early on the last morning of our stay in Tiberias we looked northward, and lo! for the first time the piled-up hills were over-arched by an enormous, glistening mountain mass, freed from mist and cloud.

Hermon stood revealed. Djebel-es-Sheikh, the white-

haired sheikh of mountains, was shining from the azure of heaven, like the materialised symbol of pure benediction on the surrounding hills, the Jordan beneath, and the peacefully smiling lake. The wide expanse of its white, rugged slopes rose crescent-shaped above the hills, the great chasms cleft in its sides showed like purple and grey veins in the marble.

The water of the lake was like a mirror, slightly shadowed in the middle distance, and beyond pale and shining like silver, stretching to the low, ascending slopes of blue hills in the north. The western shore was hazy, almost opalescent, the mountain barrier flat as a gigantic wall. Below Mount Hermon the hills dipped towards one another from either side, one ridge appearing to lap over the other as they descended to the sea-line. The dark shadow of the valley between indicated the course of the Jordan where it entered the lake.

CHAPTER XXI

THE VALE OF NAZARETH

NAZARETH, nestling in the crescent-shaped bend of one of its hills and spreading over the mountain vale, is surrounded by no less than fifteen hills, one ridge curving over the other, so that a climb to any one of these eminences affords beautiful views of the town, and many distant interesting points of the country.

From the western hill which climbs high behind the town the most extensive panorama is to be obtained. To gain the summit, sixteen hundred feet above the wadi, we began the ascent on the slope behind our little hotel at the entrance to the town. The way proceeded through a narrow cactus-hedged lane, and then turned abruptly to the right between some native houses. Emerging from these we gained the open slope of the hill, from whence we looked directly over the housetops and gardens of the town.

The foot-track skirted the hillside until we came to a great fertilised cleft dropping to the vale below : gardens covered its distant bed and climbed up the steep sides. On the edge of this gorge was a levelled platform of the rock on which stood an Arab house with its terrace and a lovely garden dipping down the

steep crag-side. From thence by a side track which gradually ascended we climbed to the summit of the hill, named Nebi Siman after an old Moslem saint whose ancient tomb was a prominent though ugly feature of the height.

Instantly our gaze, and with it our hearts, went out to the strange beauty of the plain of Esdraelon spread out just beyond the rolling ranges of the Galilean hills. It was like some beautiful sea with its softly green billows sweeping inland in broad gracious curves between the boundaries of its northern and southern hills. And upon this limpid, seemingly liquid surface rested big cloud-shadows of deep-veiled purple. The billows were the cultivated stretches of the plain, and the cloud-shadows indicated the broken, tilled soil. When in reality the shadows of clouds moved across the billowed richness of the Great Meadow—as the natives called Esdraelon—the effect was sublime beyond description.

The blue Samarian hills with Gilboa blended on the southern border into the atmospheric haze of the sky horizon. The steep declivity of one of the hills which ran from round about the vale of Nazareth down to the plain stood out darkly, abruptly, against the soft green background. It was the so-called Hill of Precipitation, near which height part of the old town is said once to have extended. On the rising ground to the right still facing the plain, tall cypress-trees stood almost in black relief against the pale pink soil of the hill and its spring verdure. Stretching out like a peninsula into the centre of Esdraelon was Little Hermon.

The eye wandered westward down the plain to the long ridge of Carmel ending in the sea. Right across to the borders of the Mediterranean lay the undulating hills of Galilee, bathed in the golden rain shed by the sinking sun. Akka was hidden from view, but the sandy edge of the bay gleamed gold. Far to the north, beyond confused ranges of innumerable hills, rose the snow-ribbed mystic heights of Hermon. Below and nearer was the village of Saffuriyeh with its fine Crusaders' ruins six miles only to the north-west of Nazareth.

Saffuriyeh was the Sepphoris of the Jews and Josephus, and, after being destroyed once by the Romans, was magnificently rebuilt by the same Herod who built Tiberias. Before the battle of Hattin the Crusaders assembled there; and it was through them that the tradition was established that Suffuriyeh was the home of the parents of the Virgin.

Then we looked down upon the town lying white and tranquil between the hills, and climbing up the slope with its houses terraced in irregular line, every one of the gleaming flat roofs clearly defined one against the other, or against the pinkish soil of the hill, broken by the vivid green of the fig-tree sprouting into leaf, by the silver-grey olive, or cactus hedge, while here and there rose a palm or a cypress. Between the congeries of white and red roofs, in the valley rose the spire of the Latin church, the dome of the synagogue, the graceful minaret of the mosque, a few imposing domed buildings, and close beneath us the homelike little Protestant church.

The hills opposite, after the first steep ascent, rolled broadly to the east, showing their farthest ridge a great distance away. From every direction came the white winding tracks across the undulating upland, all dipping into the mountain valley at our feet. On one of them a massed purple patch in motion indicated a flock of home-returning goats ; on another was a string of camels ; on the brink of the ascent a party of horsemen were heading for the town.

Above the farthest line of the hill-range rose wooded and purple the singular rounded head of Mount Tabor.

The air on the hill of Nebi Siman was invigorating and fresh. One could almost sniff the salt in the breeze that blew directly over the hills from the wide glistening sweep of the Mediterranean Sea. There are enthusiasts who declare that the air of Nazareth—as likewise that of Jerusalem—is the finest in the world. And how pungent was the aromatic scent of the shrubs and herbs that sweet spring evening ! Rich-hued flowers sprinkled the herbage as plentifully as daisies and buttercups an English field.

Not once but many times did we return to that western hill, our eyes never wearying of the beautiful vast panorama which connected, in one overwhelming whole, so many names intimately associated with all that was most precious to memory. Every time we came there, we discovered some point worthy of note that our eyes had not rested upon before ; every time we climbed there towards evening, that master artist, the Syrian sun,

painted the plain, the sea, the hills, and the ridge of Carmel in richer and more glowing colours.

There is no doubt that a birdseye view of Nazareth from the hills around shows the town and its position quite at its best. In the valley there are too many modern buildings whose new masonry and crude red roofs need the mellow tone of age to bring them into appropriate touch with the mental associations of the place. But there was a quaintness peculiarly Oriental in the narrow, winding sukh, lined with the dim little den-like shops, hung round with every variety of wares attractive to the pilgrim or tourist eye, and the stony passage between, so limited in width that one step over the perennial gutter flowing in the centre carried the purchaser from one side to the other.

Here he might be tempted by the trappings and saddlebag of the Arab horse, gaudily decorated and fringed with shell and bead. Across the way an urgent, imploring voice would bring to his notice the quaint sheath of a Bedawin knife, or an assortment of rosaries. Anon his eye would be attracted by the miniature models in clay of the Nazareth water-jars with their stands, and many articles peculiar to the Arab and Bedawin ménage. And in making selection of his purchases one passer-by after the other would linger at his side, until soon he would be receiving gratuitous advice on the subject from unabashed little Nazareth boys and girls standing on his toes, from a Bedawi or two at his elbows, and a number of interested loungers, in addition to the insinuating advocates of the wares of other shops.

When weary of the chatter and barter, it was pleasant to wander farther afield up and down the steep side-streets climbing the side of the hill, in and out of the winding alleys with peeps into hidden courts, or galleried houses, to watch idly for the opening of a door or gateway and catch within the glimpse of a leaping fountain, or to come suddenly upon a heavy cluster of blossom, the feathery foliage of the acacia, or the crest of a palm-tree peering above the parapet of a shuttered and secluded dwelling.

And once I stepped out of the blazing sunlight down a few steps into the cool, dim interior of a *carpenter's workshop*. Suddenly time seemed to stand still. The crowding thoughts were almost overwhelming.

The usual sum of visits made to the Latin monastery and church with its traditional holy sites was not performed by us. Only to the Greek church at the further end of the town we went, to see the source of the Spring of Mary, to look down upon the little channel in the paved interior through which its waters are conveyed past the altar and then through a conduit to supply the Fountain without the walls. There seemed a living reality about this undying spring which, as it is the only one possessed by the town, may readily be regarded with no mock sentiment as the same to which Mary with the child Jesus, early in the morning and again at eventide, would have drawn near to fetch water for her modest household.

We went also to the little chapel called Joseph's

Workshop, not from any faith in the site, but to see a picture hanging there to which our attention had been repeatedly called. We had already made several attempts to find the guardian of the little shrine, and finally went with a kind Nazareth friend to make another effort to see the picture. Again the chapel door was locked, but resolved not to be disappointed again, we sat on some rocks in the garden surrounding it, and looked over the town until the monk came later with the key.

Over the altar hung a large modern painting of Christ, the boy, working at the carpenter's bench, while Joseph, a dignified Syrian figure in the garb of the locality, stood watching him with serious, tender gaze. Mary, the mother, was sitting on the steps to the left; in her eyes brooded the pride, the mystery, the longing, the wonder of the great mother-love hidden within her heart. Her white veil and blue draperies were more suggestive of the woman of Nazareth than is generally portrayed by other painters of Biblical subjects.

The picture was by a French artist with a name not familiar to us, but certainly he had added feeling to a sense of beautiful colour in the painting of it. I asked the monk for a reason why the scenery shown through the open door of the cool, tranquil interior was so little like the olive-decked slopes and green and grey hills of Nazareth.

"Because it is the scenery of Egypt," he replied, after a momentary hesitation. The explanation seemed to imply a delusion on the part of both monk and artist

on the length of the sojourn made in Egypt by the Holy Family.

On the top of the hill facing the hotel was a small ugly Latin chapel only used for mass on special occasions. It was surrounded by a big high wall over which the dark tops of cypress-trees soared mournfully skyward. With the Hill of Precipitation, of which the bold outline stood darkly defined against sky and plain, as a goal in view we mounted this hill opposite our hotel and wandered along the boundary wall of the Latin enclosure.

We never seemed to get to the end of it, for it turned with the configuration of the hill-summit. Over ploughed land we trudged till we came to a native cottage whence flew out an unfriendly dog to bark his active animosity against all turbanless humans. Then we scrambled over a stretch of rocky waste land dotted with scrub and straggling bushes of juniper and wild myrtle, between which grew sparsely—in comparison with the flower prairies above Tiberias—varied-hued anemones, pink cyclamen, and the sweet lacey star called the Virgin's flower.

After this, growing desperate and despairing of ever finding a way of turning that high barrier, we descended from the ridge on the other side, climbed a wall or two—not of the enclosure—and finally dropped to the bed of a narrow valley at the base, with rich red bottom land thick with olive-trees, and freshly ploughed on every square yard of its surface. This vale we crossed, and finding an aperture through the prickly cactus hedge encircling the orchard, slipped through and began to

Nazareth.

climb a second hill from which we had hopes of gaining the point we had had in view when setting out on our walk.

The gradient of the ascent was made easier by an occasional step artificially made across the foot-track, which wended zigzag fashion to the summit. Here we found the plain little Greek church, a solitary building of recent erection viewed from all parts of Nazareth. It faced the ground stretching out along the ridge which drops steep as a precipice to the plain of Esdraelon. There are two other cliffs in the town itself which contest the right to being the original Hill of Precipitation, over which the incensed townspeople tried to crowd Christ after they had thrust Him out of the synagogue.

The Greek chapel was closed. Beneath the elevated entrance supported by two columns was a vaulted interior burrowing into the rock. It looked like a stable, but housed a native family, probably the tenders of the plot of cultivated ground extending round the building. The way by which we returned was almost directly down this hill, accomplished in a third of the time expended in finding the spot.

There was another enclosure to be seen from my window or the balcony of the hotel that constantly riveted my gaze, provoking many a meditation on the strange, mysterious promptings of human nature that could find their culmination in creation of such a community as lay concealed within those walls. The enclosure lay to the left of the small hill facing

the hotel, with but a narrow steep lane dividing the walls.

At first the eye saw only the large orchard filled with olive-trees, and then wandered with the lay of the ground, which rose up abruptly at the farther end into a steep rocky slope, with great stones peering through the grass. In one conspicuous place an excavation had been made in the slope and hewn straight as a wall. In the centre of this hewn wall was a wooden door leading into the hillside. The whole slope was strewn with débris of earth and stones after quarrying the rock and its interior. The wooden door concealed a tomb in the rock.

Then the eye turned its gaze up the olive orchard, which spread northwards parallel with the road behind the very high wall, and at the end arrested its gaze on a house with a red roof standing within the grounds. To all appearances it was a pleasant enough shaded house of brick situated in the calm seclusion of a large orchard, and separated from the highway by a little garden and the partition-wall, in order to screen off the dust and disturbance of much traffic. There were flowers in the garden, and a shallow fountain.

Closer examination discovered that the windows were all securely barred, that none of the dark shutters were opened except for an inch or two, and this discovery gave somehow a sinister, gloomy effect to the rows of dark cypress-trees planted close to the house. It looked like a dwelling of the dead, and this impression was not far short of the truth, for the house was a nunnery

of the Clarisses, a sisterhood vowed to a life of perpetual, eternal silence. In the eyar 1884 fifteen French nuns, who were all of noble birth, came and took up their abode in this dismal building and have lived there ever since. One of them, who died, was given for sepulchre the tomb hewn out of the rockside at the head of the orchard. Why she died and how is not to be related here.

In this remote Palestine nunnery, of which the very existence is an outrage in the little town, haunted by its own great memories, where the joys and blessings of a natural family life should be held more sacred than in any other spot upon earth, not a single one of these silent sisters ever comes to view. There is one outside nun from another convent who is the medium of communication between them and the outside world if absolutely required. The provisions brought to the gateway are placed on a dumb waiter that revolves behind a screen. The money for the goods received is deposited on the waiter and revolves into sight again, but never a glimpse of the human face behind the screen comes to the view of the vendor.

A carpenter who was once urgently needed to do some necessary repairs in the nunnery was allowed to enter, but he was never allowed to advance from one room to the other, or one door to another, until the sister who preceded him was hidden from view behind another door. He saw no living person at all. A voice only gave him the directions for his work.

From the little chapel in the garden, bells were

constantly ringing; there were services by day and all day, every night and through the whole of the night.

To what purpose this seclusion, these dumb lips, these barred and shuttered windows? God alone and their own hearts know.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HILL OF LIGHT

FOR seven days, instead of the usual three, the hot breath of the khamsin had lain heavy in the vale of Nazareth. The purple head of Mount Tabor—Djebel-en-Nur—peering dimly above the hills through its veil of warm grey reminded us day by day that if we did not make peculiar effort to attain to the height of that remarkable summit, we should be compelled to return to the seaboard without seeing the finest general view of Central Palestine.

Enthusiasm for the aim and object of the ride was the best spur to energy on the morning when we set out soon after six on the road to Tabor. The artist was mounted on a white horse, and I on a high, strong donkey. Our muleteer and guide, a wiry old Nazarite of the Protestant community, trudged beside us on foot. The sky was overcast with the fine haze of the sirocco deepening round the horizon; the wind was strong and strangely oppressive.

We passed over the open threshing-floor just beyond the wall of the Silent Nunnery, and climbed the opposite hill by a narrow cactus-bordered lane, abounding in holes and ditches, which emerged upon the rolling upland.

A sloping stony track conducted gradually to the bed of the first dip between the hills. Then to the right came a beautiful glimpse of the plain at the end of a narrow gorge lying between the steep hillsides. The sunny tranquil distance lay outspread in strong contrast to the almost perpendicular projection of the Hill of Precipitation which formed the frowning right wall of the winding defile.

The track trailed up and over and down three hills intervening between the base of Tabor and the little town left behind. At every hilltop we came nearer to the singular-shaped head, but the last ridge had to be crossed before the whole mountain from base to summit became visible. Part of the way we rode over rocky land with here and there little fertile clearings freshly green with young wheat.

Flowers were scattered among the rocks, the most prolific being the Palestine primrose, which is a sulphur-hued flower with fringed petals and a pale green centre. Like the primula it grows with many blossoms on slender stems, which are attached to a thicker stalk; small, tapering leaves strike out from the parent stalk.

Now and then we met Bedawin and other natives trudging over the hills; and for half the way two riders with a loaded mule kept in our close company as if glad to make part of a larger party. They were Jews on their way to one of the numerous settlements that flourish at this day in Palestine.

The last hill and its long gentle slope brought us into the zone of scattered oaks, the remnant of an

ancient forest. Here and there still remained a noble specimen, but the majority of the aged, bulky trunks had been cut low and then left to burst into fresh growth, the great bushy heads of foliage renewing the appearance of youth until the eye was arrested by the massive trunk beneath.

On either side of the track stretched a pale yellow expanse of the fringed primrose with interspaces of pink campion and the gilded daisy. Great bunches of sage-hued scrub and thorn bushes grew in between the trees and scattered down the slope to the base, which struck out gentle arms northward connecting with the opposite hill-slope. The flower of Mary—the Virgin's flower—grew near the bushes, a pure blossom set between straggling briars, or shining like a white star in the herbage beneath a thorny canopy.

The hill of Tabor rose from the valley between the slopes like some enormous tell, or a huge dome-shaped barrow, covered with the mantling verdure of foliage trees and thick underwood. Beyond the rounded outline of the southern slope ran out the green wavy line of Little Hermon in the hazy background.

At the foot of the descent we crossed a fertile valley, having to our left a big orchard of fine olive-trees thickly flaked with the pale green of its myriads of flowers. To the right were stretches of pasturage and young corn forming a green open track defiling through shelving hill-slopes right into the plain, which smiled like another Land of Promise upon the narrow vale.

Here the southern base of Tabor ran gently into the

plain, and snuggling in its lee upon the low slope were the flat pinkish roofs of the tiny village of Dabûriyeh—Deborah's village—of very ancient origin.

Then we began the ascent of Tabor by a slight rise on the opposite side of the valley; the blossom grew richer; we passed between banks of blue and purple-pink borage, and by tiny, fairy-like dells. In between the oak-trees and the shrubs were scattered lavender-tinted rocks. The path was constructed in long steep zig-zags, looking down alternately on Dabûriyeh, the plain, and the wooded hill-slope. The higher we climbed the wider the prospect, extending to snowy Hermon, and overlooking the fertile plain round the Jewish colony of Lubieh.

Near the summit it was difficult to discriminate between ruins and rocks. In the hollows of the great boulders here and there lay pools of water, reflecting the eye of heaven. The underwood was of every variety, the wild vine, myrtle, arbutus, and thorn, with large white flowering bushes resembling the syringa. The reddish spring foliage of the oaks struck a lovely note of colour against the grey rocks and the profusion of tall strong plants of flowering mustard.

We emerged from the oak and underwood coppice upon the bevelled plateau where the road divided. Our guide led us to the left towards the Greek convent to the north-west, in mistake for the Latin monastery to which we had explained we desired to be conducted. The church was in the centre of this enclosure, its short belfry painted a bright blue. The quadrangle was

flanked with a long row of barrack-like rooms, or rather cells, for the accommodation of the relays of pilgrims, chiefly of the Russian Greek Church, continually threading the highways and byways of the land. Beyond was the convent garden, and to the side a huge, square, deep depression, that looked like an old rock cistern, green with shrubs growing in its depths. A tall fig-tree reared its branches aloft, a few cypress-tops, and a magnificent lemon-tree with the golden fruit still hanging among the glossy foliage.

The president of the convent received us in a humble chamber with cordial manner. He was rather a striking-looking personality in his black robe, and a white cylindrical hat in glaring contrast to a quantity of bright red hair tucked up in thick bulging waves. His eyes shone a vivid blue, set in a fresh-coloured skin. It was a supremely anxious, eager, and highly strung face. His sole supporter appeared to be a white-haired priest, garbed shabbily in the ordinary cassock and high black hat.

The Father Superior desired that we should be indebted to him for the favour of exploring the summit of the mountain, but as our card of introduction from headquarters in Jerusalem was to the Italian superior of the rival monastery, we withdrew with due apology and thanks, and made our way to the gate beneath the pointed archway of mediæval Saracenic construction, which was topped by an iron cross.

The ruins of the ancient town, once covering this end of the summit, could be seen, in all their scattered

confusion, from the long road leading from the gated entrance to the hospice. History affirms that as far back as the time of Joshua there was a fortified city on Tabor, and the remarkable remains of fortifications, with the strong wall and towers once surrounding the whole summit, date from various epochs: Jewish, Roman, Crusading, Saracenic, rebuilt, added to, strengthened, and then again demolished, the massive foundations always affording an impregnable basis for the new constructions, until exactitude in the matter of distinguishing the various building periods has become the despair of archæological research. To the story of Josephus a number of people pin their faith—namely, that the wall with the eleven towers, of which the remains are still strongly in evidence, was constructed by him in forty days.

An amiable monk made us welcome at the one-storied Latin hospice; we rested a while in the long, shaded dining-hall, where innumerable pilgrims have been entertained since this modern monastery has been erected. Then he conducted us over the remarkable ruins, included in the Latin confines.

They extended in a lengthened, quadrangular collection to the end of the hill-summit. Looking forward, the eye rested upon a chaotic jumble of fallen walls, clustering heaps of ancient masonry, flights of stone steps ascending from hidden depths into space, irregular outlines of fallen débris between decaying walls. We wandered on, our gaze arrested now by narrow passages between walls twice their width, now by a fallen archway, or a little chamber square and deep, strangely suggestive of some

dwelling of which the débris around it were once the solid walls.

There were remains from the time of Justinian and Queen Helena, the Crusaders and the Saracens. Willibald, who travelled in Palestine A.D. 722, writes of a monastery on Tabor with a church commemorative of the three tabernacles—or booths—which St. Peter desired to weave together. Sir John Maundeville (in the fourteenth century) speaks of several churches there, all destroyed. In old itineraries the same fact of many ruins on the summit is stated, with further reference to the vestiges of the ramparts, and the remains of several churches within and without the walls. The work of demolition had then been effectually performed by the Moslems.

So far had reflection revived these historic details gleaned in anticipation of this visit, when attention was arrested by a cleared space in the centre of the ruins. It was below the gaze, for we walked on a cleared space on the ruined walls which raised pedestrians above all the scattered débris.

Under the open heavens, in a cleared space of the ancient basilica, stood a simple white-faced altar with a plain iron cross ; all the stones around had been collected and piled neatly against the old walls. The monk told us with reverent mien that we were looking upon the site of the Transfiguration.

On this interesting subject it would be vain to reckon up the books and pamphlets that have been penned to uphold one theory or the other concerning

the true site of the scenes of the Transfiguration. Many writers incline to the identification of the "high hill apart" with one of the slopes of Mount Hermon, basing their conviction on the opinion that Christ and his disciples had not left the neighbourhood of Cæsarea Philippi at the time, and that for a fitting background to that wonderful vision and the voice from heaven none grander, nor more solemn could be imagined.

Yet Mount Tabor's claim to this sacred site is one of great antiquity, founded chiefly on the written words of that early father of the Church, Jerome, in the fourth century, when he alluded to the saintly Roman lady, Paula, his fellow-pilgrim to Terra Santa, in connection with this celebrated mountain.

"She ascended Tabor on which the Lord was transfigured," is a statement that certainly points to the existence of a tradition firmly planted in the annals of the Christian Church, even at that remote date. The relics of the ancient tower and fortress, which must have been in more imposing chaos than at a later period, do not appear to have disturbed the faith of Jerome or Paula in the truth of that current tradition. Many later pilgrims to this interesting "high hill *apart*"—even up to the present day—have agreed that there are various secluded positions on the high slopes of Tabor that would have made a noble setting to the scenes of the Transfiguration.

Each theory, however elaborately formulated, has finally to be traced back to the original narrative, and such being the case, the humblest searcher after truth,

upon due comparison of the three evangelists' words with actual observation of the two hypothetical localities, should be held competent to form a personal opinion.

Tabor has always ranked among the famous hills of the land with Hermon, Carmel, Pisgah, and others. It was also one of the "high places" upon which altars to Baal were erected. It was the gathering-place of the fighting highlanders of the north in time of war. It was a landmark of distinction to all travellers from the west caravan route between Egypt and Damascus, that great high-road trod by the armies of Darius, Cyrus, Cambyses, and Rameses, from the highway between Scythopolis, Megiddo, and Cæsarea on the sea-coast.

To the people of the districts round about, it was always an honoured high mountain, nay more, it was a beacon, for from times immemorial up to this day they have given it the beautiful, and almost illuminating, appellation of the Djebel-en-Nur—the Hill of Light. Such significant native names do not fasten themselves without some basis of truth in their origin. It is also interesting to bear in mind that the same name has been given to Mount Olivet, where the final glorious Transfiguration of the Ascension was witnessed by the men of Galilee.

We passed on, leaving the relics of the churches, the chapels, the old cisterns, crypt, arched passages and courts, but yet advancing among ruins and still more ruins, until it seemed as if at one time and another every square inch of that curious oval-shaped summit must have been covered with buildings. Finally

we reached the end of the plateau, which is also the highest point, and here the monk left us, for time and solitude were essential to the imbibing of the wonderful pictures spreading out on every side into the farthest distance.

We took our station on a ruined tower of the old fortress of Josephus, one of the last points of resistance maintained heroically by the martial Jews against the Romans. The remains of the tower showed heaped-up, mounded walls of immense thickness. The ancient archways beneath had been repaired in order to bear the burden of higher ruins above, which had rugged steps leading to an elevated terrace of piled blocks of stone, hewn and ancient, embedded firmly in the accumulated dust of thousands of east winds, binding the ruins, as it seemed, indissolubly together. Grass grew between the stones, on the ruined battlements, and among the piled débris ; also gnarled clumps of ancient trees, masses of the mustard plants with stalks thick as a man's wrist, and the umbelliferous branches spreading like those of a tree, topped with numerous clusters of the golden bloom.

East of the tower was a big drop into the ancient fosse, with a massive arch half buried in earth and rich vegetation. The moat itself was a jungle of oak scrub, pomegranate foliage, briars, the wild vine, and rank, vivid greenery of every description, with not the smallest space between.

Beyond, and also curving to the north-east was a broad terrace that must have been levelled originally

for purposes of fortification. Now it was wooded with dainty saplings of oak and underwood, which grew densely over the brink. The hill-slope beneath was scattered with huge grey and lavender stones, and trees of every fantastic shape and growth. Scarlet, pink, and golden flowers glowed among the rocks and verdure; massed buttercups and big golden daisies blazed in cup-like hollows between the trees, or ran in ridges along the slope.

So much for what was in the immediate vicinity and then the glance uplifted—slowly at first, almost reluctantly, for the magnitude and majesty of the panorama beyond, and around, dazzled vision and bewildered imagination. It was a sight that once viewed could never become dim to memory. The impression made by its features of note and wonderful colouring was unalterable and for ever.

West and north were ridges of the Galilean hills rising like waves, broken and of varying height, pink, purple, green-grey, and lavender, beneath a hazy, sirocco sky which yet revealed many soft blue spaces and stretches through its veil. In the bend of the hills outlined above Tiberias the eye was arrested by a glimpse of the Sea of Galilee, white and steely as a narrow, pointed shield. Above it, Hermon's snow-ribbed highest peak, mysteriously blending with the clouds, seemed to watch like some heavenly sentinel.

Beyond this peep of the lake to the east rose the pastures and valleys of the Jaulan, backed by the distant blue line of the mountains of the Hauran, its high

tableland distinctly visible above the ranges of hills. Following the undulating line west of the lake the eye rested upon Karn Hattin rising out of the plain. An insignificant landmark but for its curious horned formation and the traditional associations.

Between Tabor and distant Karn Hattin, stretching everywhere to the far-away hills, and sweeping round to unite with Esdraelon, was the glorious plain, all cut up by tillage, early crops, and spring's high festival of colour, into a patterned surface of fantastic piece-work —diamonds, squares, wedges, triangles, pyramids, while in between, softening the angles yet accentuating the forms, wove the mantling green of young wheat, the ribbon-like tracks of vivid floral colour.

Eastward and southward the hills extended almost in a straight line, their hazy distance indicative of the depth and width of the Jordan valley between. Then the eye travelled lower to the gorge of the Sherrar dipping steeply into the Ghor, revealing the great height of the Mountains of Gilead as they rose like a colossal wall beyond Jordan.

I mounted the rugged steps of the ruined tower to the platform of piled blocks, to gain a clear view of the prospect on the south.

Directly opposite, four or five miles distant across the plain, ran a low, treeless range of hills rising into the pyramid-shaped peak of Little Hermon, or Nebi Dahi (also considered identical with "the hill Moreh"), which dropped again sharply and merged by a long sloping gradient westward into the middle of the plain,

Siloam and the Valley of the Kedron.

like a promontory into the sea. On a jutting spur somewhat to the east was visible the tiny hamlet of Endor (Ain-Dur), the grey-pink massed houses set in a dark green environment of, possibly, olive and other fruit-trees with the usual cactus boundary. Spring green touched lightly the gentle, down-like slopes of Little Hermon.

A road twisted across the plain to another village at the base of the hill with the white building of the Latin church distinctly visible. This was Nain, once the fair city called "the pleasant," now a cluster of ruins with tombs for its antiquities, which make the spot still interesting to pilgrims, though the present hamlet is a mere collection of mud-huts. Just above was a glorious meadow of blue lupins—I knew them by the colour—blue as an upland lake that reflects the unclouded sky. It divided the green fertility of the low slopes from the bare heights above, which showed the bare, red soil, and mottled grey and pink, rocky surfaces between scattered green.

The distant blue hills of Samaria with their definite outlines showed above the gradually descending headland of Little Hermon. Far down towards Carmel the eye followed the magnificent lines and curves of the plain, with its purple stretches of ploughed land looking like heavy cloud-shadows on the soft yet vivid green of the sweeping carpet.

It was just below this highest point of Tabor that Kleber, with his fifteen hundred men, marched round to the plain of Esdraelon, hoping to fall upon the great

army of Damascus unawares; they crossed the plain, turned that jutting promontory of the opposite hill-range, and at once were in presence of their enemy.

How one could imagine the wild rout of that battle, when at the close, after Bonaparte's clever manœuvres of rescue, the Turks fled in every direction! Excited and breathless watchers on this height of Tabor could see every flash and the smoke of musket-charges, the glitter of the bayonet, hear the deafening roar of the cannon, as it vibrated down the plain, and echoed back from the hills. And then, what a sight to see the gaily caparisoned, invincible riders of the Turkish army, dashing in fear of their lives from the field of action, pell-mell round the base of Tabor, escaping through the gorge of the Sherrar, or into the hills of Nazareth; to see the hordes of armed men on foot girding themselves like the Tishbite of old, and flying like the wind before their foe, swiftly as he did before the chariot of Ahab—perhaps up the wooded heights of Tabor, to hide themselves in the old cisterns, the subterranean passages which led to all the eleven towers. Then in these dark, eerie recesses would have been routed out in their turn scorpions, snakes, and perhaps a panther or two, for until a comparatively recent date the top of Tabor was a haunt for jackals, wolves, the wild boar, and many other wild creatures. "The hill and the watch-tower shall be dens for ever . . . until the spirit be poured upon us from on high and the wilderness become a fruitful field."

Once again the eye travelled slowly round that vast

panorama. The haze was increasing, the wind was high. The distant hills everywhere had taken on the aspect of flat, grey walls. Almost weary with the multiplicity of impressions crowding one upon the other, all connected more or less nearly with intimate mental associations, the eye dropped once more to the prospect at my feet. It was a rest to look upon the oak glades clothing the north-west slopes, the bossy knolls, and the sweet wild-flowers, to note the bending and waving of the foliage, to listen to its rustling whisper to the rocks, to the song of the humming flies and bees, to watch the movements of a black and white bird close by, uttering a loud inquisitive note.

We returned to the monastery and said farewell. Over the door of the small temporary church was inscribed the text, "Tabor and Hermon rejoice in Thy name."

Out through the gate of the winds (Bab-el-Hawa) —the old Saracenic gate of which the inner face was original, and the outer wall new—we rode, and skirted the southern ridge for a little distance through tangled grasses, flowers, and stony débris. The sight of the deep moat was imposing, and showed how the fortress-wall had been built up from a substructure of the solid rock, rising like a great cliff from the depths of the fosse. Relics of the ancient masonry were still in evidence. The undergrowth was as prolific as at the eastern end of Tabor's ruins.

Historians discredit the statement of Josephus concerning the time in which he states that this wall was

constructed. Haste was imperative, for Vespasian, certain of overcoming the obstinacy of the besieged in Gamala (east of the Sea of Galilee), set about subduing "those who had seized upon Mount Tabor, a place that lies in the middle between the great plain and Scythopolis." It was a difficult spot in which to sustain a siege, for there were no springs on the summit. The water had to be brought from below and preserved in cisterns. Doubtless there were already fortifications, also a wall which Josephus built upon, and strengthened during the forty days' preparation for the enemy.

By stratagem the fortress fell into the hands of the Romans. The Jews were induced to descend to the plain to arrange terms of peace. The Romans intended to fall upon them there instead of entering into a treaty; the Jews, for their part, appeared to yield, having also a secret plan to fall upon the Romans when they least expected it.

It was from this south side they probably descended to Daburiyeh (the ancient Daboreth), and out upon the open plain. When the Jews began to fight, Placidus, the Roman captain, feigned to fly before them with his six hundred horsemen. Suddenly he wheeled round and bore down destructively upon the treacherous enemy. Numbers were killed, apparently of the Jewish fighting men, the remainder finding refuge in flight, for Josephus states further that the people of the country had to deliver up their mountain on account of the scarcity of water.

The wall had good need to be of massive construction upon this side of the hill, for the steep, stony descent

was not difficult of access, and below was a broad terrace, now covered with sprouting grain, green as a grass-sward. Oak-trees of various form and size grew over the slope. From this point of view we saw the Nazareth hills jutting into the plain with dark shades over their steep sides. The Hill of Precipitation stood out, sharp and purple, in the distance.

We had ridden to the summit, but for the comfort of our beasts we descended on foot, taking many short cuts through the coppice, where leaps from rock to rock were necessary at times, and always a wary outlook. We did not succeed in rousing a hyena from his lair, though we had seen one stuffed in all its hideousness in the monastery above. Not even a snake obtruded to view in spite of the sirocco heat ; only a few harmless lizards in love with the veiled sun.

When the slope of the zigzag riding-path became more gradual, our guide, with unusual thought for a conservative Oriental, stopped my soberly tripping donkey, and suggested I should mount ; the "khowaja" he advised to wait. It was probably a question of the length of the stride, making slower or quicker progress according to the sex of the pedestrian, that inspired this chivalrous attention on the old Nazarite's part, for the evening was already at hand.

When we had crossed the olive-orchard at the base of the hill and climbed the opposite slope, we turned to take a last look at Tabor. The sight was so wonderful that the artist was fain to dismount and convey his impression of the glorious colour to his sketch-block.

As we stood there it seemed easy to divine the origin of the native name of Tabor. The whole of the mountain visible was alight with the sunset glow. It stood out, *apart* from the landscape around, suffused from summit to base with a lustrous rosy light. Over its southern background, above the lavender mists which hung near the far-away hills beyond Jordan, appeared the pale orb of the full moon.

Bathed in this glamour of sunset colour the Hill of Light seemed to grow larger and more imposing as we gazed. The mystery concealing the birth of the ancient tradition attached to its heights grew suddenly clear.

> As angels in some brighter dreams,
> Call to the soul when man doth sleep,
> So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted themes,
> And into glory peep.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FOREST OF HAROSHETH

SENTIMENT and regret intermingled as we drove away from the sweet vale of Nazareth, though observation was alert to fix itself on scenery that the uncongenial cold on the journey thither had dimmed to imagination. Instead of encountering a piercing wind we turned grateful faces to the balmy air in which rested something of the freshness of dawn. The sky was a dome of blue.

In the bed of the glen, from whence we ascended, olive-trees and fertile vegetation spread everywhere. The road twisted to the right and then dropped slowly. The pretty village of Yafa—the beautiful—peeped through its orchards on an eminence above, and then came wonderful glimpses of the plain as the carriage passed over an undulating plateau and began to ascend a rocky, uneven surface. To our left was a long, cultivated strip of land thick with olive-trees that bordered a deep wadi, which bent abruptly towards the road, and formed a cliff thickly covered with cactus shrubs. Above them on the summit straggled the grey and purple roofs of the village of Mujedil.

On both sides of the hill stretched immense olive

orchards, the rich, red soil, freshly tilled between the trees, forming a delightful contrast with the silvery, sage-green leafage. Here we passed a group of women, lithe and energetic, digging and scraping at a big mound of dried manure, turning it over from the shadow to dry in the sun and thus prepare it for fuel, while among the freshly bared surfaces fowls scratched for insects and grain. At a second manure-heap in the orchard a solitary woman grovelled and laboured, her gold and bright-blue garment wrapped up and tied around her, striking an artistic note of colour under the trees, though unsavoury the nature of her occupation. But these contrasts were so persistent that at last they ceased to appear incongruous.

We passed down the gorge with an eye to the flowers, luxuriant in the herbage, and under the lovely trees, till another village was approached. It was small and had low, cube-shaped hovels, with a few narrow, shed-like buildings over-roofed with staring red tiles. One of them faced the road with "hotel" written in Arabic and English over the doorway. Arabs were sitting in the front beneath a low, deep verandah. Though there were no windows under the low eaves of the long side of the building, there was yet a touch of home given to this quaintest of all hotels by a birdcage hanging from the only window in front. On the opposite side of the road stood a square house of some importance, grey with a gated entrance, and a courtyard with colonnade. A new, red-roofed story rose in the centre of the great square roof. The building belonged to a wealthy Syrian in Beyrout who owned much land on the plain and in

the vicinity. On the bend of the hill above this village were clustered a number of native mud-huts constructed in conical or bee-hive form.

The low marshland of the Wadi Jeda was now hardened by the spell of sunny days to a passable road-way, and the bright green of upspringing wheat and other grain gave an aspect of cheerfulness to the lonely tracts we traversed. Then we rose slowly into the lovely glades of Harithiyeh (ancient Harosheth), the continuation of the forest of oaks, syringa, terebinths, and innumerable shrubs, fragrant, flowering or evergreen, which cover the rolling hills west of Nazareth until they bend round to the foot of Carmel, barring the western extremity of the plain of Esdraelon, except where the Kishon slipped through its narrow pass.

The road, of pale pink hue, wound over the crest of the hill between greenswards spangled with yellow flowers, and picked out with small bushes. Right and left rose the scattered oak-trees of every height and form, rustling in the breeze, shimmering to gaiety under the brilliant sunlight. Looking northward, the eye was dazzled by the sight of a climbing, far-extending slope of deep gold and white blossom, with scattered grey rocks spreading flatly upon it between noble branches of trees that cast strong shadows across the brilliant carpet. Through vistas of the trees to the east, and dips in the land, were exquisite peeps of the beyond.

Through one of these was seen the village of Sheikh Abrikh, half modern, half native, standing out white and sunny on a small elevation at the edge of the plain

apart from the wooded ridge of Harosheth. Beyond this hovered the atmospheric distance of the Plain showing also the far-extending line of the blue hills of Samaria. Another peep between the trees, and not only were the sloping hills revealed but also the broad ribs running out from their base across the undulating plain of purple, green, and bright gold.

Who could pass by this feast of rare and gleaning colour, the deep shadows of the broad-foliaged boughs, and not linger by the way to imprint the lovely pictures of its environment strongly on the mind, that memory might recall them in after-days in order to throw the mirage of their secretly treasured beauty and charm upon many a parched Sahara of the pilgrimage of life?

The horses were unharnessed, and under the shade of a thickly leaved tree soon appeared to share in the kaf readily indulged in by their driver. The artist took out his colours and pitched his sketching-stool on the edge of the flower-starred sward commanding view of Mount Carmel.

Straight ahead at the end of the sloping meadow stretching between the trees rose the smooth, round head of a green knoll. It was Tell-el-Kassis, or the "hill of the priests," called by a name that seems commemorative of the slaughter of the priests of Baal to this day. Its unbroken, curved summit hid the lower part of the slope of Carmel from view. Boldly against the cloudless blue struck the noble mountain-head of El Muhkraka, the Place of Burning, the south-eastern point of Carmel, which rises here to the height of seventeen hundred feet.

The whole mountain-side slid down in several gradations which blended from afar, the light and shade indicating terrace, precipice, or narrow plateau sparsely timbered with scrub bushes, which, though appearing insignificant in the distance, proved on near approach to be so thick and entangled as to make passage through them an almost impossible feat. Up from the narrow vale, which dips more to the west between the oak-trees and remoter distance, the slope of Carmel retreated boldly with many chasms piercing its side, and indications where torrents of winter had seamed deep furrows.

A narrow foot-track snaked between the flowers, which were a mingled surface of pink, yellow, and deep gold with blue-eyed blossoms and white to add purity and clarity to the more gorgeous hues. In between them slipped a delicious green stream of spring-sown vetch, rising over the broad-spreading slope of a gentle glen, with its depths thickly wooded by the same rich-foliaged oaks. Beyond were the tenderly green, softly modelled slopes of the near Samarian hills towards which the proud head of Carmel bent with generous sweep, its shelving slopes golden with bloom, the declivities dense in shadows of rich purple.

To the right the glade climbed into a broad, high knoll, which upon near approach appeared covered with débris of ancient ruins. So rocky and rugged was the summit, and overgrown with entanglement of high herbage, shrubs, and creepers, that it defied close investigation under present circumstances, but I knew at once that it was the site which had been identified by other travellers

with that of Sisera's stronghold, the castle from whence his mother and her women had watched in vain for the sound of his chariot wheels, and looked in vain for the spoil of divers colours—"a spoil of divers colours of embroidery on both sides."

The word Harosheth, the ancient name for El-Harithiyeh, means forest, of which there still remain the thickly wooded slopes. The position of this high-timbered knoll at the base of Carmel, with only the Kishon between closing in the plain of Esdraelon, would have enabled the nine hundred chariots of Jabin, under Sisera's captainship, to act upon both plains, that of Akka as well as the Great Plain.

The Kishon purled placidly enough now through the narrow gorge by which it passes out into the plain, stretching out to the bay of Akka; but in the winter rains, or sudden storm at any time, it swells so rapidly as to be utterly unfordable in less than half an hour. Below the tell of Harosheth the pass is so narrow that the river, in bending, splashes at one part against the base of Carmel, leaving no room even for a foot-track. In one of the storms that spring up with no more warning than the cloud the size of a man's hand, accompanied by strong wind, and tropical rain, swelling the brooks and rushing madly down the slopes of the hills, the Kishon, overburdened with their redundant waters, rages through the contracting walls of Carmel and Harithiyeh with a fury that spreads flood and disaster over the lowlands, to-day, as in the day of the battle of Barak with Sisera, when—

The earth trembled, the heavens also dropped,
Yea, the clouds dropped water.
The mountains flowed down at the presence of the Lord. . . .
The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.
The River Kishon swept them away,
That ancient river, the River Kishon.
O my soul, march on with strength.
Then did the horse-hoofs stamp,
By reason of their prancings, the prancings of their strong ones.

Now of the clangour, and conflict, and stampede of that ancient warfare remained no token but the heaps of stones that were the sole vestiges of the fortress of the Canaanitish warrior. Instead of the "spoil of divers colours of embroidery on both sides" Nature had woven, with the loveliest colours in her loom, a garment for the slopes of Harosheth far richer than the dyed garments looked for in vain by the Canaanitish mother.

Everywhere reigned the same delicious festival of flowers. May ran riot in that beautiful glade—up and down the banks, in fairy, clustering rings round the trees, in collected sheets of colour, here all yellow, there all gold, here the lacy network of the Virgin's flower spangling the green, or veiling the gold, yonder a predominant note of pink flax toning the gilded marguerite, and in combination producing a meadow that was the colour of ripe apricots.

Mystery and solitude clung to the slopes of Carmel, and hid in the broad shade beneath distant trees. Blue shades gathered in the deep clefts of the mountain-side. Birds chirped to their mates from one bough to another. The air was drowsy and languorous with indescribably sweet and aromatic perfumes, and everywhere lingered

the murmur of humming bees. A voice sounded suddenly, carrying through the clear, still atmosphere from the village of Sheikh Abrikh, or of El-Harithiyeh, out of sight over the ridge we had yet to cross.

Then through the vista of trees, descending by the road we had left, came a party of travellers bringing the complementary touch of native life into that Eastern grove of oaks and flowery meads. Their mode of travel was patriarchal, as befitted their garb and the land.

Leading the party came a rider on horseback, a black-robed sheikh with a white keffiyeh over his turbaned head. With self-absorbed, indifferent air, he glanced neither to right nor left, but rode slowly forward on the road by which we had mounted from the plain. About thirty yards to the rear trudged three donkeys ; two of them were laden, almost to obliteration of their identity as donkeys, by towering and bulging boxes, and household appurtenances.

Behind the third and smallest donkey alternately walked and ran a native servant, in a loose white garment tightly girded, urging the beast to speed with incessant blows from the stout staff in his hand. Astride on this smallest of diminutive donkeys sat a woman, closely enveloped in white as a bundle of linen, the covering coming up over her head from behind, and ending in a straight line across the forehead. Beneath this was slipped the customary gauzy veil hiding the face from view. What was most conspicuous about this Syrian madam was the unstinted proportion of white-stockinged ankle, and well-developed calf, that slipped out of the

David's Gate, Mount Zion.

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bulging draperies on either side of the broad native saddle. In high-pitched, querulous voice she incited the wielder of the staff to energy, for the beast angered her by turning perpetually, first to one side, then the other of the tempting meadows. Poor little ass, that in the heat and burden of its onerous tramp was yet denied the luxury of a rest by the way, in a spot that it seemed to have some discriminating power of judging was very good to linger in.

Behind the family party stepped out a lad of fourteen in a short, loose coat of vivid orange worn above the full pantaloons tied round the ankle. He was the only one of the lot who had taken the least notice of the Franghi loiterers under the trees. His face turned, curious in expression and vivid in colouring, continually upon us, until a dip in the hill and bend of the road hid us from his sight.

Reluctantly, we gave orders that it was necessary to continue the journey. We drove down the sloping road, still passing through the welcome greenery of the oaks, and down to the marshland beyond. While the horses were being watered at the well, which had a masonry parapet built in horse-shoe shape, I looked back to the hills.

We were in a large bay of meadow and marshy ground, encircled by knobby, undulating uplands. The wooded knoll close to Carmel was the same that we had viewed from the glade on its opposite side. It was really the one head of a double mound of wide-spreading area, separated by a depression. The knoll

behind was comparatively bare but for the quaint, piled-up roofs of the village of Harithiyeh, standing out with pinkish effect against the green hills on a beautiful site which looked directly towards Haifa and the sea.

On the marsh stretching out to the base of Carmel were black cattle, standing in the tall grasses and reeds which made the Kishon invisible as it ran close to the mountain-side. Here and there were scattered thorn-bushes, and the bare purple fringes of leafless shrubs. A solitary oak stood out at intervals, lonely outposts of the forest of Harosheth. Looking westward was a peep of the big plain of Akka seen through the extremities of two hills, one a flat knoll, gold and green with flowers and turf, the broadened promontory of a ridge running out from the low slope of Carmel, and the other a wooded spur of the Harithiyeh uplands.

We drove by a wonderful stretch of brilliant gold to our right on the margin of the plain; it was one great prairie-like sweep of big golden daisies, growing so compactly that the whole was a blaze of colour, undivided by a touch of green. The saving relief came beyond and around in the waving luxuriance of the fresh green wheat with which the whole plain, as far as the eye could see, was intersected and carpeted. The route continued through this fertile plain not far from the slopes of Carmel, until it crossed the Kishon by a bridge. The river swerved abruptly northwards to skirt the base of Tell Omar—the name of the flat knoll

which shut out direct view of the plain of Akka—and then meandered through the flat reaches till it found its way to the sea.

A strongly arched bridge of the new railway crossed the river near the small bridge of the high-road, which was only just high enough to permit of flood passing in winter-time beneath its arch. The Kishon was low but broad at this point, showing the deep, white, stratified banks which the turbulent waters of past storms had laid bare. The margin above was like the banks of a moorland stream, thick with reeds and grasses, and wheat growing up to the brink. Strolling about the rocky borders were great herds of cattle—black cattle, red cattle, sturdy, and wild—their guardians sitting close to the water edge, as Arabs love to sit.

The driver of our carriage drew in his horses suddenly, and called loudly to a bronzed, black-eyed stripling, bare-kneed and bare-footed, with a loosely girdled shirt, and a gay keffiyeh, clipped with a black agal on his head. The lad listened to what was said, turned aside into the long herbage and plucked a long, healthy thistle, which he handed to the driver.

With beaming face Monsieur le Cocher turned round, the while he began to strip off the outer skin of the thistle with his knife. Then, with the air of one conferring the greatest delicacy of the land upon one who has never had the rare chance of testing its quality before, he handed me part of the peeled cane of the thistle to eat. I took it with the expression of gratitude worthiest to the occasion and tasted it; but the flavour was

insipid, though sweet, and not cool nor juicy enough to quench thirst.

Now the road ascended the low ridge jutting from the hillside across to Tell Omar. A tiny hamlet stood out against the steep base of Carmel like clustered tombs upon a rocky background. Everywhere, as we dipped again to the flat, spread out the vivid greens of young wheat. Olives now began to show as we came upon the village of El-Yajur with its chief feature a large, new, circular well, a patient donkey pacing round the parapet to turn the water-wheel. A crowd of gaily garbed women were fetching water from another spring close by, some in groups, others standing on the tops, but all momentarily arrested in action, by the passing of the carriage, to the immobility of a living picture in colours.

Then for a couple of miles we seemed to be surrounded by luxuriant orchards of olive-trees, until the large prosperous village of Beled-esh-Sheikh came in view, the grey flat roofs stretching down the slope to the border of the highway. At the end of the village were a few larger dwellings with pillars to their recessed entrances. The spring was stationed just beyond these, standing back from the road to the left, where women were again drawing water and men resting in the spray-drenched shade out of the sun. The driver took opportunity to spring from the box and take a long, satisfying draught from one of the pitchers.

The bean-fields were ripening, one or two palms rose near, and the fig-trees showed by their advanced

foliage the warmth of the April sun. Almost at the foot of the hill our route now continued. Right beneath the steep sloping roots of Carmel, several clear, plentiful springs ran out from the rock into stony, marshy basins which afforded drink and bathing-place for countless cattle, standing knee-deep therein, chewing the cud, or wandering slowly round their margins. It was a highland scene, a patriarchal picture, with the wild-looking, picturesque herdsmen tending and watching them. The water was muddy and of a deep brown colour; the rocks in it and around the margin were grey. Deep grass and reeds edged the stream that issued from them, and also the rocky basins. Oleander bushes, tall yellow blooming mullein, and a variety of marigold marked the banks.

The springs were the fountains of Saadiyeh, forming a full and rapid stream that runs into the Kishon, of which they make from this point to the sea-coast, a distance of three miles, a permanent river. During summer and autumn its waters often dry up before being replenished by the perennial flow of these plentiful, though brackish springs.

The palm-trees of Haifa soon came in view, poor and straggling at first, becoming thicker and more imposing on near approach. We saw the blue lagoons framed in the green of the trees and golden sand, the little spots of fertility, fruit gardens, flowery patches, the small grey Oriental buildings, the native thatched huts nestling on the sandy soil between the trees; and then we entered the town.

The railway, which was neither finished nor opened for traffic, even as far as it was completed when we stayed in Haifa, now runs through the plain of Esdraelon. The first station after Haifa is Afuleh, close to the little spot of Fuleh with its old castle débris, made famous by the splendid resistance of Kleber with his handful of French troops against the Turkish army of 25,000 men.

Beisan marks the next stopping stage on the railway. This is the ancient Scythopolis of the Greeks, fortified also by the Crusaders, and then partially destroyed and burnt by Salah-ed-Din. Sanguine minds prophesy a renewal of past prosperity in a great future for Beisan. Its advantages of site in a district that with proper irrigation and tillage might be converted from a desert into a fruitful land, and the wonderful springs of Beisan, properly directed, might make it a delightful residence, and render it at the same time a great centre of commercial and manufacturing activity. Naturally this condition can only be achieved under a government that will ensure security of life and property in the desolate, wild regions round about.

From Beisan the railway works northward, crosses the Jordan, halts again at Semakh, south of the Sea of Galilee, and then at Mezerib it unites with the line to Damascus.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PLACE OF BURNING

ON one of our walks in Haifa over the pleasant lowland beneath the slopes of Carmel, we came across a walled enclosure, lying back like a garden from the winding road near the sea. Its aspect was secluded and calm; tamarisk-trees abounded, and beneath them were restful and cool shadows. We opened the gate and entered the little Friedhof of the German colonists.

But it was an English, not a German name, that riveted my gaze, as I glanced towards the headstone of the first grave at the end of the little avenue by which we had approached:

"ALICE, wife of LAURENCE OLIPHANT, aged 40. Died 1886. Canticles v. 2.—*En tout Nika*."

The lives and personalities of these gifted and noble mystics had always possessed great charm for my mind, but though the portraits of both Laurence and Alice Oliphant had been daily before our eyes on the walls of the little German hotel, I had not realised, till that moment in the quiet graveyard, that sweet, beautiful Alice Oliphant had been laid to her rest in the shadow of Carmel. Than the words from the Canticles, "I sleep but my heart waketh," none more appropriate and

touching could have been chosen for one who wrote: "It is impossible not to yearn sometimes for the days when the partings will cease. They so lacerate and tear one's very core. Yet, except at weak moments, I realise more and more that these pains belong only to the impatience of our outer nature, not to our essential part, which remains joined to all that it has ever bound to itself with the magnet power of love." [1]

The house in which they dwelt entirely, until they had built their summer house in the Druse village of Daliyeh on Mount Carmel, was in the same road as the hotel, on the opposite side, with the inscription "Haus Oliphant" over the porch. Their memory still lingered as the odour of dead violets in the minds of the people who had loved them during the four years of their life in Haifa and upon Carmel; the Druses, the Germans, the Syrians, and the poor Jews in whose settlements they took so active and practical an interest.

We determined then and there after making a few necessary inquiries to go on pilgrimage to Daliyeh at the time of our impending expedition to El-Muhraka, the Place of Burning, on the south-eastern summit of Carmel's ridge. The more one reflected over and recalled to mind the happenings of those two extra-ordinary lives, the more appropriate it seemed that, in coming to settle in the land of Galilee, these visionaries, so united, unselfish, and single-eyed, yet at the same time practical, brilliantly intellectual and ahead of their age, should have made a home upon the Mountain of

[1] *Life of Laurence Oliphant*, by Margaret Oliphant.

Oracle, within but an hour's ride of that mystical site, the Place of Burning.

Through the intermediary of a kinsman of the Druses in the bazaars of Haifa we communicated with the village of Daliyeh, with the result that the brother of the sheikh constituted himself our guide and escort over the uplands of Carmel. It was arranged that he should bring the animals for our use to the hotel on the summit of Carmel, to which we had ascended for a few days, and that from El-Muhraka we should proceed to Daliyeh, and spend the night there as guests of the sheikh of the village. This hospitality would be requited in the ordinary course by an adequate addition, in the shape of backsheesh, to the sum agreed upon for the hire of the animals and guide.

Very early in the morning the Druse was waiting for us near the hotel. An interval of rest was needed for the two donkeys and the horse in his charge, but we were well on the route before seven o'clock, for the ride to the Place of Burning would take up the space of five hours, exclusive of any time we should linger by the way to sketch in colour or pencil. Our guide walked, or rode, as the mood took him, on the donkey which carried our well-lined saddlebags and the artist's sketching gear.

He was a tall, handsome Druse of self-possessed demeanour. He stepped out with proud, free gait in his distinctive garb, his keen face, the clean-shaven chin, the long knife in its sheath, and the musket, giving him a military air rather than the pacific aspect of the peasant.

Our path was through the cornfields which spread over the ridge with a plenitude indicative of fruitful harvests. For some distance we could view the sea on both sides, but it was the deep blue of the Mediterranean stretching south that remained most constant to our gaze until undulating uplands closed it from view.

Of the beautiful wild luxuriance of the inner parts of Carmel it would be impossible to give an adequate description. We had seen the excellency of Carmel bursting forth through the stony terraced slopes of its northern flank, but now every mile of the track winding over its broad summit seemed to confirm the fact of its ancient renown as a hill of vineyards, when King Uzziah had husbandmen and vinedressers in "the fruitful field" (Carmel), when David went forth against the man Nabal who had great possessions in Carmel: three thousand sheep, a thousand goats, and vineyards which yielded the hundred clusters of grapes, orchards which contributed the two hundred cakes of figs that Abigail the wife of Nabal brought down through a covert of the mountain to propitiate the enemy of her husband.

The vineyards were now chiefly restricted to the slopes, north and south; their cultivation seemed a matter of laborious toil which in time, doubtless, will bring back a measure of past fertility, but the flowering thickets, the park-like stretches of scenery, the massed collections of fragrant, brilliant blossom, testified how readily the uplands of Carmel could once have symbolised beauty in the Oriental imagery of the poet; how the

withering of its luxuriant verdure and foliage could suggest, through prophetical augury, an emblem of dire desolation to the national mind.

At intervals stray figures crossed our path. Once it was a picturesque peasant in garb of a curious dead-red hue, and a dark keffiyeh slung round his keen, bronzed visage, stalking through a plot of wheat with his high, thick staff. Another time it was a group of blue-robed women filing through a distant meadow starred with blossom, their backs bending low beneath the burden of stacked fire-wood. Then it was a party of mounted Bedawin, armed with gun and lance, their black-draped figures, black headgear, black beards and wild black eyes giving them a more than ordinary sinister aspect in the sunny silence and solitude of the upland landscape.

The land we rode over was dotted with underwood and small trees of the evergreen oak, strewn with bushes of the cistus, thorn, and myrtle, fragrant with the smell of aromatic plants, radiant with the bloom of the same lovely flowers we had seen decking the plains of Galilee.

Then came a sidelong glimpse of one of the numerous "coverts of the mountain" with which the sides of Carmel are seamed. Beyond a tract sprinkled with stones, overhung by the rock-rose or cistus, the ground dipped first gradually, then by rapidly descending strata of rocky terraces and steep declivities terminating in a deep gorge, in which the rich purple and grey shades indicated that its precipitous slopes were overhung with trees and brushwood. Through the far-away mouth of the cañon

gleamed a golden strand against the sea of cerulean blue.

Near the base of the distant slope, almost at the foot of Carmel, was visible a grey-toned medley of houses. These constituted the village of Et Tireh, once famous in that desolate, deserted part of the coast as the home of robbers. Its reputation even to-day is none of the best.

We drew near the northern side of the ridge, approaching and then entering into the shadow of a grove of oak-trees, called Shejaret-el-Arbain, or the Trees of the Forty. This name alludes not to the number of the trees, as would appear at first sight, but to the statement in an old legend that forty victims were once martyred or sacrificed on this site. This was doubtless one of the "high places," the sacred groves, denounced with such scathing emphasis by the ancient prophets, and that still prevailed when the Romans were the dominant power. The relics of ruins and débris of rocks and stones point to buildings of which some of the foundations still seemed to remain.

It was a spot to linger in. The oak-trees had curiously twisted gnarled trunks ; their grey bark, tufted with foliage, looked deliciously cool. Some of these trunks curved and grew horizontally over the red soil, their branches covered with light green foliage growing close to the ground. Stones were lying around on the leafy soil beneath the strangely twisted boughs which cast deep shadows on the sheddings of past years' foliage.

Brushwood grew around in dense clumps with an intervening sward of green, spangled with yellow primroses. Nearer the thicket, purple scabious grew in profusion, and great scrambling bushes of the cistus, exactly like the pink dog-rose.

Over the heads of these flowering shrubs we looked straight down on the plains of Akka and the Kishon, upon the broad crescent of light sand, with the wavy, feathery background of the dunes, over the marshland of purple ploughed earth and its spring green. The sky was cloudy, showing pale vistas of the blue beyond, the horizon of the far-reaching sea was lost in haze. Akka glistened at the edge of the bay, with the rising background of Galilean hills, and Hermon again dominating the whole far-away north.

Boughs swaying in the breeze swept with rustling murmur against the massed rocks in the background of the wood. The sound of the wind through the trees rose in a soft crescendo and then died away. A wood-pecker was tapping on the bark. Birds twittered and chirped, or gave a low, clear whistle. The echo of a human voice carrying from afar only enhanced the solitude and tranquillity of the cool, shadowed precincts.

Over undulating ground of the same character as we had passed we rode for an hour, then rose an eminence at the edge of Carmel, where flat-roofed houses, pink and grey-toned, ascended like terraces surmounting one another, thickly clustered round the slope, which dipped to a great gorge revealing an enormous extent of the plain below.

One white house looked conspicuous among the rest. The loose stone-piled walls which led up to the village—it was the Druse village of Esfiyeh—formed barriers to the orchards laid out chiefly in olive-trees. The ground dipped downward in wild, rugged terraces partially clothed with brushwood of dwarf oak sprouting into the tender red of spring foliage. Trees of great variety were dotted over the slope, there was marvellous colouring on the plain. The purples, greens, and greys were all veiled in amethystine haze, and mysterious with the kaleidoscopic procession of cloud-shadows.

And now we were close upon the famous site after a short ride between Esfiyeh and the ascent to the knoll of El-Muhraka. Right up to its lonely summit grew the wild chaparral which seemed like an enchanted wood to bar entrance to its mystic secret.

By means of a tortuous, narrow track we penetrated the thicket, the thorny shrubs checking progress like so many invisible detaining fingers. Everywhere grew the light green low oak-trees, the myrtle tipped with young growth of a brighter hue, the white blossom of syringa and wild pear, the pink and lavender roses of the ubiquitous cistus. The scent of the pines was strong, mingled with the aroma of wild thyme and sage, which grew broadcast among the underwood.

We emerged on the rocky plateau edged with a few scattered stunted trees, wind-blown into curious shapes. The whole surface was carpeted with flowering herbage—giant daisies golden and white, poppies, the

prolific mustard tall and gay, purple lupins, the sulphur-hued primrose.

The small Latin chapel, an erection of recent date, was plain and unpretentious; annexed to it was a small flat-roofed building. Close behind it were the remains of a stone wall, enclosing a surface of bare rock, with great stones around it embedded in the ground with a certain regularity of form.

This was the traditional spot of the oracle on Carmel, the Place of Burning where Elijah built up with stones, after the ancient custom, an altar of the Lord which had been destroyed by Queen Jezebel, the worshipper of pagan deities.

Throughout all the ages this spot on Carmel seems to have been revered and kept in remembrance from one generation to another—by the worshippers of the God of Israel, by the followers of Baal, the great pagan sun-god; and up to this day it is held sacred by Jew, Christian, Moslem, Druse, as the site of the miracles of the prophet Elias, holy to each and every sect. According to old itineraries, pilgrimages were made to the "spot." It is one of the few "high places" of the land from which tradition has never wandered to another possible site for commemoration of the same circumstances which made it celebrated.

As a place of oracle it was considered so famous that Vespasian turned aside to climb to its summit and consult it concerning his future. "There is between Judæa and Syria a mountain *and a god*, both called by the same name of *Carmel*, though our predecessors have

informed us that this god had no image and no temple, and indeed no more than an altar and solemn worship," writes Josephus. "Vespasian was once offering a sacrifice there at a time when he had some secret thought in his mind; the priest, whose name was *Basiledes*, when he, over and over, looked at the entrails, said, 'Vespasian, whatever thou art about, whether the building of thy house, or enlargement of thy lands, thou art granted a mighty seat, very large bounds, a huge number of men.'"

It was a spot where the scenes of buried ages could be revived in the mind to a semblance of living reality. Far back as the earliest remembrances of it can be historically or scripturally traced, the site had been without image and temple, "no more than an altar and solemn worship" connected with its most ancient ceremonies. Nothing but the blue arch of heaven overhead, a panorama of commanding majesty, a spot of seclusion, difficult of approach, surrounded of old as now by the sacred grove, which seemed nature's own offering to its supreme Creator.

Yet, hidden in the woods somewhat to the east are the ruins of some ancient building which are supposed to be relics of an old fortress, or possibly a watch-tower guarding the outlook over the plain and the great caravan routes during the occupation of Syria by one or other of its conquerors.

A great cactus hedge, with openings through which yawned steep descents, bordered the northern slope of the plateau. Shrubs of every variety and trees clambered

over the hillside. A large oak-tree with its massive trunk split up into three divisions stretched gaunt, sparsely leafed branches over the rocky declivity towards the plain.

Then came what to me was the most interesting discovery of all. We dived through one of the tempting apertures in the cactus hedge, giving a spring from rock to rock for every step taken, and, after some twisting and turning, came upon a huge flat slab, embedded like a small platform in the side of the hill. It was fissured with dents ; its position was one of commanding interest. It may have been only the remaining giant stone of a terrace in the mountain-side, built at some time when, from the Place of Burning, the smoke of sacrifices ascended daily, yet something in its aspect, its size, and solidarity, riveted attention.

The question sprang involuntarily to mind : could this be the true Prophetic Stone, the ancient Stone of Oracle consulted by Vespasian, the mystic slab upon which, six centuries before Vespasian's visit, Pythagoras had traced signs which he interpreted as revelations from the Unknown God of Carmel and the unseen world ? From the solitude of the hilltop, from the wind sighing through the waving, rustling foliage and grass, came no reply. The oracle of to-day was dumb.

It was, however, a point of vantage which gave a wide-extending view. We took our station on this great bevelled rock, and while the artist imaged the picture in colour with his brush, this is what conveyed itself to my mind and memory :

The whole of the declivity was overgrown with an entanglement of bushes and trees, waving grasses and flowers. The masses of green were of every shade from the darkest evergreen to the palest tints of spring. Enormous rocks of a chalky whiteness stood out from this luxuriant foliage like the ghosts of some ruined city. They tumbled through the thick chaparral, from the edge of the great stone, down the cliff-side to a fertile plateau lying some distance below with an orchard of olives in its centre. Beyond this, the hill dipped again in a gradual descent. A spur of the ridge of Carmel ran out boldly to the right, its moor-like stretches forming a hilly barrier to the plateau, before it curved gently towards the plain.

A white road showed plainly at the foot of this off-shoot of Carmel, and beyond this rose a low, oval-shaped knoll, about two hundred feet high, bare of all but green herbage gilded with flowers. This was Tell Kaimon, the site of one of the ancient cities which once guarded the great plain and commanded the entrance from the Wadi Milkh, through which ran the ancient road already mentioned.

The plain of Esdraelon looked of an immense area from this high point. Over it moved the shadows of great clouds weaving a marvellous effect of light and shade into the intricate patterns of its grand surface where purple, blue, green, red, and yellow mingled in distracting brilliancy. The forms of the Galilean hills on the opposite border showed wonderful curves and strange variety of colour.

Tabor had its rounded head and eastern slopes in shadow, while the base and western segment of the great domed hill shimmered in sunlight to the texture of velvet. Between Little Hermon and Gilboa dipped the valley of Jezrael, disappearing into hazy, mysterious distance. To the right were the Samarian Hills, low and rolling, the individual peaks showing, for miles away, strong contrasts of light and shade.

The road to Nazareth could be traced from the glades of Harithiyeh across the lowland to the winding route, which led round and through the hills to the secluded town. Northward on the heights of Harithiyeh the lovely oaks, dwarfed by the distance, stretched far away as the eye could reach.

The Kishon looked but a silvery ribbon winding through the red ploughed land below, with patches of yellow flowers on its banks, or stretches of wheat, till it slipped out of sight close to the side of Carmel far down to the left. The plain bare head of the little Hill of the Priests—Tell-el-Kassis—marked its barrier.

CHAPTER XXV

DALIYEH—THE HOME OF THE OLIPHANTS

THE lonely little chapel on the summit of El-Muhraka was locked. No one seemed to have made their home in the small dwelling attached to it. The wind rose sweeping over the height, and up from the sea over the flats of Kishon, till it was impossible to dally longer on this elevated site without suffering great discomfort. As fatigue after the long ride, and several hours spent on this lonely plateau in blazing heat weighed heavily upon us both, we set off on the way to Daliyeh.

With stolid, unconcerned manner, our Druse guide had yielded with an admirable endurance to the strange vagaries of his Inglizi charges. It was quite in order, however, that we should have displayed such keen interest in the spot regarded by his sect with deep veneration as to remain there for several hours.

We anticipated our visit to Daliyeh, not only for the associations connecting it with the Oliphants, but as well for the opportunity of comparing these Druses of Mount Carmel with their brethren of the Lebanon. Our guide—his name having escaped me he can assume that of Nasif,—had the same clean-cut features and

dignified manner, but his tall, slim figure appeared to lack the wiry energy of the northern highlanders. For the brother of the sheikh of a prosperous village he was none too sprucely garbed, though the red-and-white striped coat suited his dark, handsome face admirably. The hours of contemplation afforded him by our long stay at the Place of Burning had not been irksome to him.

The village of Daliyeh, however, far from bearing an aspect of prosperity, looked humble and neglected. I had noticed from the summit of El-Muhraka that several villages in view on the eastern slope of Carmel appeared to have high walls around them, so I was prepared to see the high, walled enclosures that constituted the greater part of the village of Daliyeh. It was the survival of a precaution against marauders from the plains of Esdraelon and of Dor on the coast. Bedawin in great numbers were wont to encamp on these lowlands—they do to this day—and their plundering expeditions were the terror of peaceable villagers. Those were times—not many years ago—when it was dangerous to pass from one village to another unless in numbers, and well armed. The enclosures were also necessary for the safeguarding of the flocks at night.

We turned aside from the narrow lane under a vaulted gateway into the court of our host's dwelling. This consisted of a square, low building divided into four wings opening out upon the court, which was a mere compound of dust and refuse.

At once we were surrounded by a bevy of women and children. Helter-skelter over the court and out of the houses they ran to render their salutation of welcome, and to eye with avid, open curiosity the unusual visitors to their home. The guest-chamber was over the gateway opening out upon the flat rectangular roof. Eager hands assisted me out of the saddle, and I was so desperately tired by this time that it was almost a luxury scarcely to feel my feet touch the ground as the women half-pulled, half-hoisted me up the steps which ascended to the roof.

With joy both the artist and myself beheld the present haven of our rest so close at hand after the burning heat of the day, the blustering hot wind of the afternoon, and the ride of seven hours. Sight-seeing for that day at any rate was to be a sealed book. Just a sheer relapse into the *kaf* of the Orient was the yearning of our souls, a mattress or divan upon which to stretch our aching limbs, a refreshing draught for parched throats, with perhaps a humble meal, and then sleep, refreshing sleep, worth all the other desires of the moment.

Now we were on the roof facing the quaint little chamber over the gate. The low door was burst open, our hosts led us to the threshold and ushered us into the room with eager ceremony. I gave but one swift glance around and then, seized with secret dread and horror lest, in some unexpected manner, the blazing sun of the long day had affected my brain, I stared helplessly at the artist.

The similar vacancy of his gaze fastened upon myself seemed to denote that he had been galvanised by a similar delusion. Was it a case of mirage? mutely queried our eyes; was it a new representation of the ancient fable of the king, who, finding his chief pastime in bewildering his courtiers with the lightning changes of his wardrobe, appeared at last in a costume they pronounced the finest of the lot, but which the first child who clapped eyes upon him cried out was no costume at all? And whom did the delusion touch in this presentation of the revived myth, ourselves or our cordial, well-meaning hosts and hostesses?

For the guest-chamber was absolutely naked of a stick or rag of clothing. Four bare walls stared us in the face, and a bare floor, that had been newly swept but left totally ungarnished. Disappointment was scarcely the word to use. We were staggered. Expectation had been so sweet that this cruel reality struck one for the moment as more afflicting than comical.

As usual the artist, recovering his normal attitude, was equal to the emergency of the moment. It was evident that the initiative in preparations for refreshment or repose would have to come from our side, though we had been given to understand in advance that these same people had entertained English visitors from Haifa once before, and would have made necessary arrangements prior to our arrival. Fortunately we had brought various comestibles with us, in spite of assurance that all that was essential in the way of food would be forthcoming on the spot.

"I want some hot water quickly, to make tea for the *sitt*," said the artist in a firm voice, looking round on the score of turbaned men and veiled women crowding into the empty room. He further explained that we had brought the tea with us and only required water to be heated.

His words were echoed loudly on all sides. There was a general movement out to the roof and down to the court, where, in a distant corner, partially protected from wind by a low stone barrier, stood the brazier and its cooking apparatus, which appeared to do duty for the whole community within that enclosure.

An old woman assumed the rôle of mistress of the ceremonies, and was soon issuing her orders in a manner that brooked no delay in their execution. The artist gave them to understand we anticipated a meal of some kind, also so much clothing of the guest-chamber as would suffice to give us a resting-place for sleep.

While the embers of the half-extinct fire were being coaxed into life, a Druse youth, at the behest of the old woman, was chasing over the court a frantic hen that was to be sacrificed to the hungry appetites of the visitors. Meantime the artist had conjured up, with the help of the same useful old Martha, a shallow basin in which to brew tea. He restrained her desire to make use of the water directly it began to get hot. After due explanation of the necessity for boiling water, he turned to find a stalwart Druse at his elbow, holding the captured fowl by the neck in one hand, and an uplifted knife in the other.

"Wait a minute," he said on the spur of the moment.

"Why? You are not afraid?" came in a half-smiling, half-amazed query.

"No, no! Not at all!" disclaimed the artist as he poured about a cupful of water over the tea-leaves and bore off his basin in triumph. "Bring more water, please," he called as he crossed the court.

More water was brought, but he had omitted to say *hot* water, so they carefully threw away the remainder of the boiling fluid, and followed him up the steps and into the room with a jar of cold drinking water. The artist explained that while the pot and fire combined were preparing a fresh supply, we should be pleased if they would get some milk.

"Ho! Boys!" shouted the woman. "Milk for the *sitt* and *khowaja*!" and away scampered two bare-legged youngsters out through the gateway for their lives. After some delay they returned driving a goat before them, which yielded for our refreshment a bowl of fresh creamy milk. Goat's milk when used in this way for tea has not by any means the strong flavour which it acquires after boiling. As there are many districts in Syria where the milk of cows is unobtainable, it is useful when travelling to find out a little detail of that kind.

While the fowl was being prepared, duly stuffed with pine-seeds and rice, and put into the boiling crock with a whole galaxy of gherkins also padded with rice, the women of the court invited me into their apartment.

The guest-chamber meantime had undergone a gradual transformation. Matting had been unrolled on the floor, and upon this two mattresses were placed against the walls with two or three small bolsters. From the house of the Oliphants, as we were told later, a small table and two dilapidated chairs were conveyed, and placed in the room. The aspect was cheerful in comparison with first impressions.

The interior of the house, which I entered at special urgent request on the opposite side of the court, was low and dark. To the left on a deeper level were stabled the animals of the household. Through one of the low arched openings at the side of the room I could trace in the vaulted penumbra the dim outlines of the horse and donkey which had brought us to Daliyeh.

Under a barred window opposite the door were spread out some rush mats and a few cushions where I soon found myself seated surrounded by the women, all interested in extracting every personal detail with which my limited Arabic vocabulary could supply them. For the rest, this interior was like others I had been in, having the usual niches for holding things, the recesses which contain by day the wadded bed coverings and often a rolled mattress or two ; and the tall stand for the Eastern lamp, which once I had set eyes upon in Syria, made clear, in its real similitude, the light on the candlestick (or *stand* as the Revised Translation has it) "which gives light to all that are in the house."

These women of Daliyeh differed in a more pro-

nounced degree from their Lebanon sisters than did their menfolk from the northern Druses. The feminine type was less classical in feature, yet singularly pretty and winning. They had oval faces, full eyes, well set beneath sweeping brows. Their figures were of slender build with an easy, graceful carriage and light step. One of the young married women had blue-grey eyes, a piquant face, and a large but perfectly shaped mouth, which in smiling showed a dazzling row of big, white teeth.

Their costume was most picturesque: loose blue pantaloons of the ordinary Turkish kind drooping to the ankles; over these a short tunic to the knee of white or some colour, open in the front to show the white muslin or embroidered vest beneath. The white veil was clipped to the shape of the head by a fillet of colour or black, folded across the forehead, fastened behind, and the ends mingling with the drapery of the veil.

Two or three of the women, however, were dressed in the long full skirt opening over the white front which extended to the feet, familiar to me in the Lebanon. Instead of the metal girdle and clasp a slender sash was bound round both robes. I saw a green, a blue, and a soft red-coloured dress made in this becoming and graceful mode.

Yet be it reluctantly confessed that pretty sounding as these details may appear, and picturesque as was the effect taken as a whole without close examination, the costumes were none of them clean and had seen much

rough wear. Though the veils in general were fresh, the fillets had not only lost their pristine lustre but were often greasy. The pretty faces themselves would have been the sweeter and fresher for a good wash at the nearest brook, but nothing could mar the beauty of their eyes or the ivory of their perfect teeth. In a word, to me the women of Daliyeh were very fascinating.

One of the girls was a bride-elect. She was the centre of attention while busying herself unconcernedly over a little hand-made cardboard case for holding kohl, henna, and other toilet accessories. She was decorating it with beads and tiny odd bits of ribbon, listening to yet taking none of the eager advice rendered to her in turn by every one. It was explained to me by one and the other that the wedding cushions and coverlet, that had been made for the bride to take to her new home in Esfiyeh, were to be used in the guest-chamber that night for me, an honour and privilege for which I made every effort to express adequate gratitude and pleased surprise.

The evening meal was waiting my presence. "Come, for all things are now ready," was the message brought in by one of the children, as to the artist this interior was forbidden ground. The children were small replicas of their parents; the little girls looked of a decidedly Irish type, with coloured kerchiefs covering their heads and tied carelessly under the chin.

The two headmen of this large household waited upon us themselves, receiving the various dishes of fowl, stuffed gherkins, plain rice, leban in a big bowl, cheese

THE MOAB HILLS FROM MOUNT ZION.

and native bread, from one and the other of their families, who all vied with one another in eagerness to have a share in carrying these good things across the court and up to the threshold of the guest-chamber.

The visit to the house of the Oliphants we put off to the morning on account of my great fatigue and the approach of night. During our repast there had been a rushing, pattering noise in the lane at the foot of the gateway, accompanied by the loud cries of boys and men all busily engaged in driving a large flock of goats into the court. We walked on the roof later, and it seemed in looking down upon the enclosed space as if we should have had to make a carpet of the black fleeces compressed into so small a compass, had we attempted to cross the court in its present state.

Now, as it happened, our visit to Daliyeh had been timed unknowingly beforehand to correspond with a total eclipse of the moon. This coincidence becoming known to me later was one that weighed upon my mind. I had heard of so many weird superstitions rife among people of the country concerning eclipses, that I was exercised in my thoughts as to how the local imagination would regard this coincidence; as to whether our visit coming at the same time would be regarded as an evil or a superlatively good omen.

"As a matter of fact they will know nothing at all about it," said the artist, to whom I confided my misgivings. "It does not begin till midnight."

Thus reassured we prepared for bed, unrolled the sheets we had brought with us, and lay down to rest

on our respective mattresses. This, of course, not until we had drawn the enormous wooden bolt that secured the door, and also closed the shutters, which looked out over the lane and on two sides of the roof. It need scarcely be added that glass windows did not exist in this primitive lodging.

The light was extinguished. The darkness into which we were plunged was such as could be felt, an enveloping, stifling, palpable blackness. Every one else seemed to have gone to bed too. No lights had been anywhere visible before we closed the last of our wooden shutters. Never had sleep seemed so difficult a god to lure. The night promised to be as long as several rolled into one.

All at once I was alert, quite certain that I had heard a stealthy footstep, then another. It seemed to me I could hear these stealthy footsteps creeping to the window, that there they paused as if some one was listening to ascertain if we were asleep. The eclipse of the moon had been seen, was my first thought: the augury was bad; we had unwittingly offended our entertainers, was the next thought, or worse still those stealthy shuffling footsteps—I was convinced I heard them—belonged to other dwellers of the locality, less honest and hospitable than those of this household. The situation filled me with a horrible dread! And then——

Thump came a terrific bang at our door! Another and yet another, as if the battering ram of the ancients was being put to use with the stern purpose of bursting

into our chamber. Before we could draw breath after the first startling panic of alarm, bang came a repetition of this amazing bombardment on both shutters at the same time.

"What's all this row about?" came from one couch.

"The eclipse," came in feeble response from the other, for now, to my fevered imagination, there remained no other explanation of this furious midnight attack than that the incensed villagers were determined to let us know their opinion of the contemptible foreigners who had conjured up the darkening of the moon.

"I'll soon put a stop to it," called the artist, springing from his mattress. I knew this by the tone of his voice, though the Cimmerian blackness of the room defied penetration. "Where are the matches?"

As he spoke there came a long, loud, wheezing sneeze at the base of the door, sounding for all the world like the strong, composite sniff of the concentrated disdain of all Islam for non-believers. It was a sound that revealed the whole situation when it was repeated, not once but a dozen times, as a playful variation to the butting and banging on the panels of wood.

The goats from the court, evidently the whole herd, had climbed the steps to the roof. Insulted at their exclusion from a spot familiar and dear as a favourite rendezvous, they gave immediate outlet to their views on the matter. When every one of them in turn had bombarded the offending barricade, and sneezed violently beneath the door, they held a festival of gambols and races on the four sides of that terraced roof. The

sovereign lord of sports himself must surely have presided over that frolic of Pan and his satyrs. May we never again be within earshot at night of a similar saturnalia.

Right glad I was to open the shutters a few hours later and welcome the freshness of dawn. The weird visitation of the hours of darkness faded from memory, like some horrid chimera into limbo, at sight of the white light of day. The people of the court were astir as soon as we were, and we even forgave the goats when breakfast brought us the new beaded milk to add to the morning coffee.

Then we set out to visit the house of the Oliphants. It was just on the border of the village in a beautiful situation commanding a view of the wide long valley descending to the open sea.

The massive fortress of Athlit showed far away but distinctly on its rocky promontory, which jutted boldly into the sea, with its water barrier on one side deep and still as a lake. The name of Pilgrims' Castle was given to this magnificent ruin by the Crusaders—Castellium Peregrinorium—because pilgrims at that epoch made it a favourite landing-place on their way to Jerusalem. Its real origin and history anterior to Crusading days remain a sealed record, yet according to the observation of archæological experts there are remains of an antiquity in this gigantic stronghold more remote than can be traced in any other ruins on the coast of Phœnicia.

Laurence Oliphant, in constant view of this pictur-

esque promontory, regarded the ancient castle with keen interest, and no doubt his conclusions written about it were founded on close study of the whole area.

It was sad to see the forlorn look of the small frame villa which had once shown so sunny and home-like an aspect. The two old people in possession readily allowed us to enter, and for the sake of our interest in the memoirs of the vanished household go through the house. Imagination failed to re-people those bared, characterless rooms—fallen through disuse into so neglected a state—with the bright images of their original inmates. It was like seeing the husk without the kernel, or the shell of the chrysalis after the winged Psyche had soared into the empyrean.

But there was a large, roofed verandah, big as a room, between the two upper wings of the house, and here it was easier to picture the "mystic and sweet oracle of Carmel" resting after her household cares, which made her also the "cheerful mistress of a kindly house"; to imagine how Laurence Oliphant, emerging from mystical meditation, would jot down in view of that lovely valley and distant Athlit the ideas of humorous fancy and satire that were the saving salt of so complicated a nature.

It was a picture revived by imagination to house in memory's stores. On the return to the village we were called aside into a small yard, walled and attached to a native dwelling. An obelisk confronted our gaze within. It was the monument erected to his wife's memory by Laurence Oliphant when he returned to

Daliyeh the year after her death, convinced that there, more than anywhere else, her spirit would be with him, inspiring every word he wrote. "I feel her thoughts impregnating mine," he wrote from Daliyeh, "and forcing them into expression, and unfolding wonderful things to me so simply that I hope all who read may learn and understand." He was then bending every effort of his mind upon his last book, the book which he considered the best of all he had written: *Scientific Religion; or, Higher Possibilities of Life and Practice through the Operation of Natural Forces.*

We parted with regret from the simple-hearted, primitive people of Daliyeh. They seemed reluctant to let us go; in fact we promised to go back at some future time, and, with the experience gained of what was necessary, to make out of that little chamber on the roof a lodgment for a prolonged stay. To disciples of the "Simple Life" no experience could test the reality of their principles more fairly than a sojourn under similar conditions in or near one of these truly simple villages on Syrian soil.

CHAPTER XXVI

ST. JEAN D'ACRE—HISTORIC MEMORIES AND A NEW RELIGION

THE sight of Akka, marble-like and glistening in the sunlight across the azure bay, and the pale curved coast-line beyond, merging into the white promontory of Ras-en-Nakura, never failed to stimulate imagination. Historically, though not Biblically, it was one of the famed spots of the country, and we did not neglect to drive over one day to visit it.

The Kishon was too deep at this season to be passed through at the mouth on the seashore as would be possible a couple of months hence in the dry season. A deep, sandy track diverged from the water edge and passed through the plantation of palms as far as the pontoon bridge, which our driver crossed with such caution that he requested us to alight while he led his horses. On the opposite side of the river—it was about twenty feet wide—we mounted into our high carriage again and drove for a short distance over a swampy rutted track between the low bushes, thistles, and reeds.

Then the course swerved into the river itself, the

water coming up to the hub of the wheels as the carriage skirted the mud-bank that was overhung with tall feathery reeds. It was somewhat of a relief to emerge from the unknown pitfalls of the brown opaque stream, branch off to the shore, and bowl briskly along the firm level sands, one wheel splashing through the waves, the other on dry land.

We alighted at intervals to hunt for shells. Our quest chiefly concerned the spiny shell of trumpet shape (*Murex bucinum*), which contained the far-renowned scarlet juice that, mixed in subtle proportions with the black and red yielded by the true purple shell (*Pelagia* or *Murex brandaris*), produced the ancient Tyrian purple, famous and regal even in the Homeric age. The shells which afforded me the keenest pleasure to spy out were small shells of an exquisite fragility, varying in colour from amethyst to lilac shades as they lay, like tiny sweet violets, half concealed in the sand.

As we drew near to Akka, the low-lying appearance of the city stretched out on its promontory, with the compact multitude of terraced, domed, and peaked roofs, cupolas, minarets, and isolated palms showing above the sea-wall, became imposing, and assumed an elevated position. The River Na'amein (the ancient Belus of the Phœnicians) was safely forded, and then the way verged into a pleasant avenue lined with tamarisk and other delicately but thickly foliaged trees.

Gardens and orchards stretched out gaily from the river bank, bordered by the ubiquitous cactus, lighted up with its myriads of yellow and orange-hued blossoms.

Here and there spread out the graceful plumes of a stately date or fan palm-tree.

The charm of this unexpected wealth of gay blossom and greenery almost on the margin of the sands invited one to linger, to turn aside and investigate the deep-shadowed recesses beneath the trees, but the mystery of that walled city just ahead seemed to beckon us urgently forward. Those were not the same battlements from which the Crusaders had shot forth their deadly arrows, or hurled down the blazing missiles, or on which the Knights of St. John had made heroic stand against the Paynim; but very similar must have appeared the old fortifications in that fatal spring of 1799 when the young Bonaparte planted his standard on the knoll called Richard's Mound, and his intrepid sappers prepared the trenches so soon to be filled with the dead and dying of their comrades.

The gate into the town was at the south-east angle of the wall near the water edge. There were open-air cafés in the wide space before the gate where the usual loungers were sitting beneath the thick shade of large tamarisk-trees. Vendors of vegetables, fruit, and grain were there with their camels and asses. Soldiers passing to and fro reminded one that Akka was still a military station of importance in this part of Syria.

Our carriage remained without the wall. We had heard so much that was forbidding about Moslem fanaticism in Akka, that the aspect of the high walls within the gate—the only exit from the town—seemed sinister as we entered on foot. We had primarily

planned to pay this visit under the kind escort of an Effendi of position in the town, but owing to postponement of date on our part, we anticipated that he would be away on this particular day. Our surprise was agreeable, therefore, when this same Syrian gentleman overtook us in one of the narrow streets. He had been sitting in a café within the gate, had seen us pass by, and hastened in our wake to offer himself as cicerone to the various points of interest.

A visit to the serai was necessary in order to ask permission to view the ramparts and sketch there if desired. A narrow, high flight of steps ran up the outer court from the open street. These we ascended, passed into a corridor, and were ushered into the reception-room.

Here the military Governor, dressed in Turkish uniform, received us with a suave courtesy that amounted to cordiality. He plied us with many questions concerning our visit to Akka, and was so far satisfied with the explanation given by our distinguished companion, as by the artist, that he readily gave the required permit, and sent a soldier with us as escort to facilitate our progress. The Governor's son, who was one of the small crowd of officers forming an interested audience to the conversation, had only just returned home after a lengthened term of military training under the Teutonic flag. He spoke German to me personally as a variant to the ordinary French and Turkish.

We came away after the customary cigarettes and coffee. The full circuit of the walls—about two and

a half miles—we did not attempt to make, but we walked over the ramparts which guarded the land side of the town. The lines of fortification forming the angle of a square were high and imposing, having a deep moat between the inner and outer walls with earthworks thrown up to strengthen still further a position already guarded by nature. To the right could be seen the old aqueduct striding across the plain to the gardens of the Bakjeh a mile away. Its fine arches near the town appeared to have been about thirty feet high, though on the ascending ground beyond the proportions diminished in height.

It was the same aqueduct—built by Djezzar Pasha—near which the French cavalry and Kleber's division had encamped during the siege of Akka. They broke it in various parts to deprive the besieged of the water it conducted to the town. Headquarters had been fixed on the same line a little distance off, and yonder, behind that ridge running almost parallel with the sea, had been stationed the bulk of the French camp.

The tower which Bonaparte took for the stronghold of the defence, and made his chief point of operations during five vigorous assaults, stood in the angle of the walls. Across the deep fosse upon which we looked down from the ramparts the fire-eaters of Sultan Kebir had swung their scaling-ladders and penetrated to the tower, only to make the maddening discovery that there was no exit from it into the town.

At the sixth assault, made through a breach in the curtain to the right of the tower, they had fought their

way right into the town ; but the sustained fire from the crenellated parapets which dominated the inner entrenchment, and the barricaded streets with their massive, blank-walled houses, compelled a retreat after scenes of fearful carnage. The same spirit of desperation and dare-deviltry had directed the seventh and the final assaults. The French troops were imbued with the fatalistic notion that death awaited them in one shape or other ; if not on the battle-field, then in the ambulance, for the plague had made horrible ravages in the streets of the camp, sparing neither generals, officers, nor men.

It was not only with Djezzar Pasha that Bonaparte, lacking all the necessary siege artillery, had had to contend, but the skilled engineership of Colonel Philippeaux (the French Royalist, brought to Akka by Sir Sidney Smith to conduct the defence), the English artillerymen of the British warships, and Turkish reinforcements conveyed by sea to aid Djezzar in his determined stand against the army of the French Republic.

To-day a score of old-fashioned mortars, inscribed with the date 1795, stand on the battlements—survivals that seem to mock the heartrending records of that disastrous campaign, for Bonaparte's convoy with heavy artillery was captured off the headland of Carmel by the English ships. The guns we saw with this inscription were some of those which Bonaparte had the mortification of confronting after they had been planted on the Akka rampart against himself. Among the long cannon were also a few English pieces, the carriages of which seemed in a very untrustworthy, weather-worn condition.

The son of Djezzar Pasha repaired the ravages wrought upon the battlements and town generally by this siege, but in 1832 Akka suffered another disastrous one, lasting for six months, at the hands of Ibrahim Pasha. This Egyptian pasha, in co-operation with Emir Beshir, conquered Syria for Egypt, but after bombarding Akka till it was again in ruins, he set himself the task of rebuilding the city, taking special pains with the fortifications. It was his great idea to make an island of the promontory. The sea washed round the north-western wall of the city for some distance, so that by continuing the fosse from the north-east angle of the square down to the south-east corner by the only gate, this aim would have been practically accomplished and have rendered Akka almost impregnable as a military station.

Before the scheme was completed the Lebanon was again in revolt, and the Powers combined to regain Syria for the Porte. The fresh bombardment and capture of unfortunate Akka by our fleet under Napier was the event that overthrew Egyptian supremacy in spite of Ibrahim Pasha's brilliant resistance. There is a terrible instance related of the ferocity with which he punished the Druses for fighting on the English side. Twenty-four of their chief men—akkals—taken prisoners by strategy and held as hostages were put to death in boiling oil within the purlieus of his own dwelling.

The fortifications now to be seen at Akka are those which were built up after that last severe bombardment by English authority. One portion of the wall over

which we walked concealed a prison beneath. Through a well-like aperture we peered into the horrible dusk of those huge vaults, and saw men below bearing the savage aspect of encaged beasts.

Then we descended to the streets. The mosque built by Djezzar Pasha we could not enter on account of the extreme disfavour with which the Moslem man in the street at Akka regards Christian intrusion upon their holy places. We entered the court which enclosed it, however, and viewed the exterior of the beautiful building, decorated with handsome marble incrustations and arabesques.

Galleries shut in the court on every side, supported by pillars and roofed with a number of small cupolas. In the middle was a fountain with a few trees which gave a garden-like aspect to the whole. The soldiers of Bonaparte had penetrated the city as far as this court, a feat not forgotten to this day.

Relics of Crusading architecture are still to be found in Akka. We peered into a couple of vast interiors used as stables, to see various ancient columns and a massive bottle-shaped pillar which supported the vaulted roofs. In the great khan by the sea-wall granite pillars form the colonnade enclosing the immense court.

There is a personality in Akka whose name always stirs up interest in the minds of travellers who desire to do more than skim the surface of things. The name of Abbas Effendi is known not only in Akka but in all Syria, in Persia, India, Turkey, the United States; and even in Paris he has not one but many supporters of his creed.

He is the present head of a remarkable religious sect which, developing in Persia some fifty years ago, soon attained such hold on the minds of the people that its influence was considered pernicious by the ruling powers, and persecution promptly followed.

The founder of the new religion was a young visionary named Mirza 'Alí Muhammed, who assumed the title of the Báb (Gate), declaring at the same time that he was the latest revelation in the flesh of the Divine will. His strong personal influence, bearing upon his propagation of a system which appears to have been only a new fusion of doctrines already existing in other systems of religion, had an amazing fascination for people who came directly in contact with him, or through hearsay were attracted towards the new faith. It is a known fact that wherever and whenever a Mahdi has preached his gospel in the East there have always been listeners eager to give ear to the novel message, for the religious strain in the blood of the Oriental once roused becomes the dominant power of his life. In Persia, the cradle of mysticism, the oracular sayings evolved by this new prophet from the inmost kernel of his mystic contemplations were hailed as the greatest, most marvellous revelation of Divine intelligence ever granted to men. Extraordinary interpretations were put upon every word he uttered.

The Báb proclaimed the new faith, of which he openly avowed himself the Divine mouthpiece, during six years of persecution conducted on lines of a drastic, unparalleled severity. Among his immediate apostles

and general adherents were counted many intellectual men of good position, and holding enlightened views. These people were hunted down like wild beasts, put to death by the most horrible torture that the ingenuity of fiendish man could devise. Like the Christian martyrs of old "they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, evil entreated, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth."

Still they held to the new faith with the resoluteness of those who, finding truth, cannot be forced by any possible means to relinquish her. As if in emulation of those same Christian martyrs to faith, the Bábis confronted death and torture with the ecstatic exaltation of soul that appears to hypnotise the body into oblivion of pain. It was enough for any one to be barely suspected of favouring these devotees of the Báb: he was thrust into prison or killed summarily with no inquiry as to the justice of the accusation.

The sect was founded in 1844. Six years later came the martyrdom of the Báb. In less than two years all his immediate apostles were done to death also, after severe persecution and tortures indescribable.

The year before his death the Báb announced that his was not the final revelation, that yet a greater manifestation of divinity would appear on earth to comfort the Bábis, for his own foretold death, and their continued

sufferings. Then he gave forth that "He whom God shall manifest" was incarnate in the person of a youth of eighteen to whom he gave the name of Subr-i-Ezel, which means the Dawn of Eternity.

To this successor appointed by the Báb himself was accorded the high position of their martyred leader. Persecution dogged him with the same persistent ferocity, and finally with the notion of preserving the new faith from utter collapse he fled from Persia to Baghdad. He had a step-brother, Behá'u'lláh, some years his senior, who followed him there at a later date.

After the lapse of a decade the influence of the new Báb, and the increasing numbers of his followers, so displeased the Persian Government that the transportation of Subr-i-Ezel and Behá'u'lláh to Adrianople in Turkey was brought about through the Shah's instigation. It was at this point of the history of the Bábis, after the compulsory exile of their leader to a distant country, that a split came in the united camp.

Behá'u'lláh, after acting on behalf of Subr-i-Ezel in all matters that required the energy of a practical nature, suddenly revealed that he himself, and not Subr-i-Ezel, was the one designated by the first Báb as "he whom God shall manifest." The reasons he set forth for the new revelation were so convincing to many of the Bábis that soon there were two factions, and so much subsequent friction that the Turkish authorities separated the half-brothers: Subr-i-Ezel was sent to Cyprus, and Behá'u'lláh to Akka.

The doctrines of the Bábis are to be found in the sacred writings called the Beyán, but they are so voluminous, and enveloped in language of so mystical and allegorical a nature as to be unintelligible to the casual reader. The conduct that is the practical outcome of the faith in these doctrines is summed up in the Christian teaching of the fruit of the Spirit. They try to live in charity and peace with all men, in a word to fulfil their duty to their God and their neighbour.

Their first efforts were in the direction of social reform. They aimed at raising the standard of women, an unusual innovation in the promulgation of a new Oriental belief. Again one is reminded of the likeness borne by the Bábis to the early Christians, for women were the most devoted and constant of Christ's followers. It was not woman who,

> with trait'rous kiss her Saviour stung,
> Not she denied Him with unholy tongue;
> She, while apostles shrank, could danger brave,
> Last at His cross, and earliest at His grave.

Behá'u'lláh was responsible for many changes in the original doctrines systemised by the Founder. For one thing, he expunged from his version of Bábi teachings anything that savoured of Mohammedanism, though against Jews and Christians he had no ill feeling. On the contrary he was always an advocate of toleration. The Bábis of the first eight years believed also, like the Christians of the Apostolic age, that the end of all things was at hand, and that with it would come a

glorious victory for their faith. Behá'u'lláh preached the advent of a deferred millennium. His adherents, who constitute by far the majority of the Bábis, still believe firmly, like the Druses, in the final triumph of their own religion, even though the consummation may be delayed beyond the thousand years of prophecy.

Behá'u'lláh, before his death, transmitted his power to Abbas Effendi, his son, who is still a prisoner in Akka, and is acknowledged by the Bábis as the latest manifestation of the Divine Spirit. Pilgrims have resorted to Akka from all parts of the world to confess their belief in his holiness, and receive his blessing. The number of his adherents in the United States was once named to me by an American citizen as fifty thousand. In Paris there is a small community which has sufficient members to warrant the building of a Bábi temple of worship.

Abbas Effendi lives in a house situated at the extreme end of Akka, as remote from the gate of entrance as he could well be placed. A villa was built for him by his adherents on the slope of Carmel above the German colony. At one time he was allowed to resort to it freely for a change of residence, but owing to injudicious efforts made on his behalf by numbers of his admirers the authorities took alarm, and he is now kept a close prisoner in Akka.

He was invisible on the day of our visit to Akka, and we had no later opportunity of going there, as our long stay in Galilee had drawn to an end. We visited the Hill of Napoleon later in the day, the knoll which

was his chief point of observation during the siege. The return drive to Haifa was accomplished under similar experiences to those of the early morning. For lunch we had been the guests of the kind Syrian effendi.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PORT OF JERUSALEM

"WHAT is to be seen in Jaffa?" is a question put by travellers to one another as they gaze from the deck of their steamer upon the sunlit, gay-looking town overspreading a headland, which from the flat nature of the coast might be said to assume the prominence of Telegraph Hill seen from the bay of San Francisco.

"Nothing at all!" comes as likely as not in reply. "It is only a means to an end. We want to get up to Jerusalem, and the railway starts from Jaffa."

The travellers thereupon rush through the custom-house, drive to one or other of the really good hotels in the German quarter of the town, eat their lunch in a tremendous hurry, and then dash off to the station. On their return from the Holy City—that is, if they do not take the ordinary trip northwards through Samaria to Galilee—they may perhaps be compelled to stay longer in Jaffa than they intended, owing to the delay of an expected steamer. In that case they make discovery for themselves of the pleasant spot, and interesting centre for various expeditions, they have nearly missed seeing on their journey through Palestine.

The name of the "Port of Jerusalem" given to Jaffa in the first century by Strabo seems as applicable to-day as then. There is no harbour except for small sailing vessels, and the description given by Josephus of this ancient maritime city is as truthfully graphic of the approach to the shore, and the difficulty of landing at all in stormy weather, as it was, doubtless, in the days to which he alludes.

"Now Joppa is not naturally a haven," he writes, "for it ends in a rough shore, where all the rest of it is straight, but the two ends bend towards each other, where there are deep precipices, and great stones that jut out into the sea, and where the chains wherewith Andromeda was bound have left their footsteps, which attest to the antiquity of that fable; but the north wind opposes and beats upon the shore, and dashes mighty waves against the rocks which receive them, and renders the haven more dangerous than the country they had deserted."

The allusion in the last sentence is to the Jews of Joppa, who, at that time, were pirates scouring the length of the Syrian coasts. Vespasian invested the town, and the brave residents making no resistance fled for refuge to their ships. The "black north wind" took them by surprise, and dashed their craft on the rocks. As many as four thousand Jews perished from drowning, or, when washed ashore, were put to death by the Roman soldiers.

But all that happened two thousand years ago—or very nearly—and only the spiked rocks which still guard the tiny haven bear witness to that tragedy, and probably

JERUSALEM AND THE MOUNT OF OLIVES—SUNSET.

countless others, for the number of sieges which Jaffa has sustained are not to be counted. Like Akka, the town has been practically destroyed over and over again. At the time of Napoleon's memorable siege of Jaffa it was a walled city, but now there is scarcely a trace of that ancient rampart visible except on the hill near the old castle vestiges, and also on part of the water-front.

The glory of Jaffa to-day is visible in its gardens which trail round the outskirts of the town, showing a striking luxuriance of growth and beauty of blossom. Not only the orange-groves shed their fragrant perfume, but all kinds of fruit-trees and flowering shrubs. We visited the town at different seasons of the year—in February of one year, in March, June, and November of another year—yet not once was I disappointed in the unvaried loveliness of those gardens of Jaffa. If the fruit was not hanging on the trees the blossoms were gaily decking them, or the tender foliage of young growth. There one saw the delicate fragrant blossom hanging on the same bough as the perfected oranges, glowing

Like golden lamps in a green night.

Cactus hedges enclose the orchards as elsewhere; tamarisk, oleanders, acacia-trees abound. A walk through the narrow winding lanes will disclose thousands of oranges gleaming in the numerous trees. One day we passed a flat-roofed Moslem house embedded in greenery, and entered the paved yard at the owner's invitation to watch the natives busy at work. They were squatting

on the ground packing oranges for dear life, rolling them deftly into the tissue paper which envelops them when they are sold in England. On one side was an immense pile of prepared fruit, on the other was spread out the whole wealth of gold which had been stripped from the trees in that special garden.

The flower-gardens surrounding the residential houses were all rich in that radiance of colour only seen under an Eastern sun. The paths would be lost for very richness of bloom and foliage. Our room looked over just such a garden as one of these. It belonged to the neighbouring hotel, but through the courtesy of the owners, visitors were generally allowed to wander through its beautiful mazes, or rest beneath the shadow of the abundant foliage.

The first time we revelled in its beauty was in March, when every flower seemed in bloom. On all sides vistas opened out between the trees revealing bright patches of crimson, purple, yellow, and pink. The bougainvilleas showed their purple and crimson flowers ; the stars of the poinsettia were vividly red ; the jacaranda rivalled the sky in the lovely blue of its blossoms. The graceful acacia foliage with its drooping clusters of scented flowers hung everywhere.

The paths formed a labyrinth between the shrubs, and emerged at the end of the garden upon a straight terrace ; this was bordered by a white stone wall, dropping low on the off-side into an orange-grove from which wafted in strong sweet gusts the perfume of orange-blossoms. Beyond lay the town, its terraced roofs and

Oriental outlines bathed in a light of purest transparency. At the side of the path by which we approached the wall was an immense weather-worn tub, toned to a delicate grey and purple like an ancient tree-trunk ; it was choked to overbrimming with masses of large purple petunias. The oleanders and azaleas were laden with pink, crimson, and white blossoms. Roses clambered everywhere, giant geraniums flourished like young trees overrun with bright colour ; the scarlet flowers of the hibiscus were a marvel. To all this choice and exuberant display of leaf and blossom, palm-trees of every variety added their waving plumes, and the aloe its barbed poignards.

Early in June this garden seemed lovelier than ever though the siroccos of an unusually dry spring had worked damage to vegetation generally. The whole gamut of colour was repeated in wonderful variety on plants, shrubs, and trees. During this visit to Jaffa we spent many hours in the shade of the huge flowering trees. It happened in this way. A whole colony of Bedawin tents, clustered in the sand-dunes beyond the northern extension of the town, attracted our attention, and, with the hope of finding models, we determined to become acquainted with the inmates. Our knowledge of Arabic at that time was practically nil, but a Jaffa resident of German extraction—in fact, one of the owners of that beautiful garden—who had been brought up to speak Arabic as fluently as his mother-tongue, offered to accompany us to the tents.

As it happened this same clan of a vagrant type of

Bedawin entertained a huge respect for Mr. H. because he had once outstripped their fleetest runner on an occasion when he had, good-naturedly, arranged to run at their request. The people received us at their tents with curiosity and *empressement* of manner, fetched out the smartest—that is to say the least shabby—mat in their possession, and spread it on the sands for us to sit upon. Then they squatted around us thick as bees, carrying on an animated conversation with Mr. H., whom they had hailed with a display of great enthusiasm.

Their first question concerned the mutual relationship of the two Franghi visitors, the second the size of their family. Two young mothers, who were nursing their chubby brown babies, and could not have been more than sixteen or seventeen years old, showed great concern that the *sitt* had no babies like their own. And then they made a very curious inquiry which I mention on account of the strangeness of such an impression having travelled so far as the plain of Sharon. They wished to know most solemnly and seriously if it was a truthful statement that "the mothers of England refused their children the natural food of babes."

The women of these gypsy Bedawin of the sandhills cover their faces like Moslem women, but their veil is Egyptian in appearance, trimmed with shells, coins, and beads, and having a curious nose-bag which allows only the eyes to be seen. Our curiosity had been stirred with regard to the beauty of one of the young wives whom Mr. H. had known when she was a small girl, long before her marriage. By dint of a little diplomacy

FATMÉ.

we removed from our first station on the sands to the front of her tent in company with her husband Suleiman, and the mother of her husband, called as is usual, Um-Suleiman (mother of Suleiman).

The rest of the crowd withdrew, for they had been told with many an expressive gesture in the Arabic tongue, of which they knew we were ignorant, that the artist was a man subject to fearful attacks of jealousy, and that he objected strongly to his wife being the centre of a staring crowd. It was a state of mind for which they had every sympathy and proper comprehension, and set Suleiman thoroughly at his ease, for a Franghi who thought so much of his own wife was not likely to think too much of the Bedawi's wife.

When, therefore, it was suggested that I would like to see Fatmé without her ugly nose-bag, Suleiman allowed her to uncover her face in spite of the presence of the Inglizi *khowaja*. Fatmé was a darling, with her dear little brown face, tattooed round the pouting lips. She had expressive grey eyes which reflected the sky when she smiled, and she possessed a quantity of finely plaited brown hair looped over her forehead and hanging on both sides to her waist. Her figure was well developed and gracefully modelled. Her baby boy seemed nearly as big as herself, and certainly he must have been the hungriest baby in the whole of Jaffa judging from the zest of his appetite.

Diplomacy was required again to enable the artist to procure her as a model for his brush. It was arranged we should visit the tents on the following day with

the tea-basket, hold a picnic in Fatmé's tent, and thus make the husband amenable to the proposition. We started for the Bedawin tents under a sky scintillating with heat about three o'clock the next afternoon. The people saw us coming from afar and swarmed over the sand-ridges to meet us and relieve us of the big basket we were carrying.

In honour of the occasion Suleiman and Fatmé had transferred their dark brown tent to a clean patch of sand, emptied the interior of everything but a few cushions and the usual wooden chest, opened the front of the woven walls, and spread out the matting that we might sit upon it in a semicircle sheltered from the sun. On the glaring sands without, spectators from the other tents quickly collected and squatted in a second bigger crescent, consisting chiefly of boys and girls, and a melancholy-faced relative of Suleiman.

His presence embarrassed us. No other men came near on account of the previous warning of the Franghi's jealousy ; on no account, they had been told, were they to approach the tent where his wife sat in seclusion. Nothing could persuade the intrusive relative that his absence would be more desirable than his company, and it was not etiquette to order him to withdraw. He scented the tea and held his ground till that function was over. Until he retired, sketching was out of the question, as it was only on conditions of strict secrecy that Suleiman had consented that his wife should sit for the artist.

Meantime, Suleiman boiled water in the open in

an old pewter jug, while I spread a towel on the sandy floor and emptied the basket. We had not dreamt of entertaining so large a number—the elastic quality of a party in Syria was at that time new to us—but the difficulties of distribution were shifted from my shoulders to Fatmé's responsibility. Our Syrian friend told me the correct phrase by which I transferred the honours of the party, according to Eastern etiquette, to the little Bedawin wife. In her own tent she became the hostess irrespective of all other considerations.

When the feast was over, and the customary interchange of complimentary phrases, Mr. H. drew the guests away from the tent, leaving us in sole possession with Suleiman and Fatmé. We closed the tent on the side that had been opened, turned up a flap on the opposite side and began the drawing. Time went all too quickly, however; so much of it was lost in procuring the necessary solitude that we made arrangements for Suleiman and Fatmé to come alone to the garden of which I gave an earlier description, where no prying members of the camp could view the wicked practices to which consent had been given.

Eight o'clock next morning we repaired to the rendezvous. No models had arrived. At nine o'clock our kind friend mounted his horse and rode off to fetch them. He brought back word that they were preparing, we might expect them every moment. They turned up in the end about ten o'clock: Suleiman, Fatmé, baby Mahomet, and the baby's grandmother. We carried them off in triumph to that shady walk at the

end of the garden overlooking the scented orange-grove, the Eastern houses of the town, and a beautiful glimpse of brilliantly blue sea.

They were tired and thirsty and inclined to be cross with their unusual exertions. Fatmé's head was a wonder to behold with the numberless fine plaits into which her abundant hair had been woven afresh. I fetched them some fruit, and bread and cheese, which they devoured eagerly, squatting in a circle on the path, taking no notice of the artist, who seized the opportunity of sketching an apparently famished group of nomads.

Another appointment was made for the next day at the same hour of eight o'clock. The necessity for punctuality was impressed upon them to such good effect that they arrived in the cool of the morning at the early hour of five. A manservant awoke Mr. H., who lived in a small house in the garden apart from the hotel, with the news of his early visitors. With uncommon amiability under the circumstances he dressed, brought the Bedawin into his little house, and kept them amused by showing them his various possessions. Fatmé was transported with the gift of a piece of scented soap, and at once set about washing her face and hands with gusto.

We found them waiting at the appointed hour in a mood of amiable complacency. A big meal of cucumbers, bread and cheese—the selection of food made by Suleiman himself—bound them such willing slaves to our command that they besought us then and there to engage them as our servants for the whole

time we remained in Esh Shems. Suleiman's sole comfort at the moment of farewell at a later hour was the promise of the *khowaja* to bring him a big pistol on the occasion of his next visit to the country.

During one period of our intimacy with these Bedawin of the plain of Sharon and Sefelah, Suleiman had to be sternly reckoned with. When Fatmé arrived late one morning, her grey eyes moist and tragic, her lips quivering like a chagrined child, it transpired that she had been beaten by her husband—here came in the touch of nature making all the world akin !—for refusing to resign to him the whole of the money she had been paid for the first sittings. When she refused to give him more than half, the stout Bedawin cudgel was exercised freely upon her back. We rated Suleiman so soundly that, fearing the entire loss of this grand opportunity of making money without labouring for it, he promised to abstain from the use of the stick for all time. Poor little Fatmé ! she fell a victim to the epidemic of cholera which spread disastrously through Palestine the year after our return to Europe.

Near the banks of the river Auja, about an hour's drive from the town, stands a small hill which is called Napoleon's Hill to this day. We drove towards it along the Nablous road, past the flourishing village of Sarona, which is another settlement of the "Temple" sect of the Germans. The route was exceedingly rough ; flat rocks embedded in the soil alternating with shoals of heavy sand making progress slow and difficult.

Napoleon's Hill was a high knoll which assumed

its imposing position from the circumstance of a level environment. At the foot we alighted and climbed to the summit to see the view, which was more comprehensive than one would have imagined. The Levant glittered the hue of a polished sapphire behind the long coast-line of undulating sand-dunes. Against the southern horizon stood out the promontory of Jaffa with its turrets and terraced tiers of houses, and the fertile stretch inland of orange-groves, olive-orchards, fig-trees, and gardens of all kinds.

The plain below us was burnt up by the blazing sun except where efforts had been made to wrest production from the thirsty earth. Yonder was a patch of barley in process of reaping, the native figures rich in colour against the golden straw of the grain. Three camels browsed calmly in the shade of the hill, their contented mien contrasting favourably with that of their fellow-workers in Jerusalem. The eye wandered further afield to several acres planted with melons, the rich soil of deep red colour enhancing the green of the trailing leaves and tendrils thrown out from the parent stems.

A low chain of mounds intercepted the eastern view, but behind us the plain of Sharon stretched out in vast undulations to the blue atmospheric hills of Judæa. Their modelling, delicately shaded, was clear though such a number of miles away. The summit of the hill of Napoleon was large enough to accommodate several tents. It was a position that must have commanded the whole of his army encamped on the plain between the two rivers of the Auja and Miserare.

The Auja, though the second largest river in Palestine, rises only ten miles north-east of Jaffa, where an old Saracenic castle once commanded the route across the plain. Though the fall is slight from its source to the sea, the rush of water is strong enough to work several mills on its banks. One of these was situated about five hundred yards distant from the hill close to a cluster of Arab huts on the margin of the river. There was a weir and a small dam, and below the dwarfed mill the water rushed through low arches, splashing and purling with much vehemence of motion. The ground looked rich and fertile ; on the banks the yellow sand shimmered through the greenery of the plants.

The second stream, the Miserare, meandered between deep, crumbling banks of red sand from the direction of Jaffa, in and out of the cultivated stretches until it flowed into the Auja some distance below the village. In the height of summer this stream would dwindle into a thread and probably dry up. With the winter rains the wadi would once more contain a turbulent rush of waters renewing the life of the river Miserare.

A few mulberry-trees with wide and leafy foliage were grouped on the bank of the Auja. Beneath these we drew up and found on the sandy surface below a welcome retreat from the glare of the June sun. Vines in scattered clumps decorated the ground, and formed, with the leafy, wide-spreading trees, an oasis of the thirsty land. A peculiar ground thistle with spiky yellow stars of blossom grew along the border of the river intermingled with the big-leafed tendrils of the vine-plants.

The clean yellow sand in the side of the shelving bank made a pleasant resting-place. We sat down and watched the little river at our feet travelling quickly to the sea. The rippling water reflected fleeting shades of red, green, and blue from the red soil of the opposite bank, the waving reeds bending over it, the blue vault of the sky overhead. The one-storied mill to the right, built of grey stone, and its flat roof, were a foil to the blue sky, while the water rushing through the arches beneath introduced life and a passionate energy. The mud-huts and stone walls of the Arab village blended imperceptibly into the landscape, lending themselves chameleon-like to the picture with unconscious art of arrangement.

Tall, stately-robed Arabs crossed the line of vision at intervals, and stopped on the bank above the weir to gird up their nether garment. Then they waded through the shallow water and stood, high and picturesque, on the opposite bank against the sky before proceeding on their way. A woman in the customary blue draperies came from the village to fill her jar at the river, then swinging it to her head she walked with queenly erectness to her sordid hut in the rear.

One evening we strolled from the hotel in quest of Tabitha's Tomb, which had been a discovery of the last century only. The identification of this special tomb with the last resting-place of the benefactress of apostolic fame was connected with a vision and an apparition, woven into a story that seems to have gained credence in much the same way as did the dreams of the peasant-girl in the cave at Lourdes.

It occurred to me when listening to the wonderful tale, related with full faith in its veracity by a native, that hearsay of the Lourdes visions had probably stimulated local imagination in the orange-gardens of Jaffa, for the dates of the spiritualistic manifestations were certainly approximate. As is usual on such sites, a convent, church, and various buildings had quickly sprung up near the bed of the newly discovered sarcophagus.

From the German colony we passed into the lanes winding between the groves until we came to the Greek monastery gate and mounted a flight of steps into a beautiful garden, where a number of cypress-trees stood in imposing sombre array. Beyond the church with its tall spire, a landmark throughout the suburbs, a number of steps led down to a long broad terrace. At the end of this terrace there came more steps which descended to a low, venerable-looking erection of stone, its flat roof on a level with the terrace.

This was the edifice built over the tomb of Tabitha. We entered through a wicket gate and found ourselves in a cavernous interior with side niches and a recess at the further end. These were all fitted up as shrines in plain yet tawdry style. Coloured prints hung around, images were on the stone slab, and a number of tapers brought hither by faithful devotees. It was an ancient sepulchre in which we stood, though no one living could divine whether or not it had been the tomb of the saintly woman after whom it was named. As such

alone, there was a something intangible to be felt within the dim, lonely interior that stilled momentary scepticism, and brought thoughts of another world than this.

This Greek Church settlement with its gardens was a little to the north of the Jerusalem road, one of the three great thoroughfares which start from a large open space, once the gathering-place of caravans, muleteers, travellers, beggars, and a motley crowd of all nationalities, before the Jerusalem gate of the town. At one time, when Jaffa was a walled city, this gate was the only entrance, and though walls and gate are now things of the past, the old habits are not so easily laid aside, and still this "open space" is one of the most crowded parts of the town.

We emerged from the gardens into a road which was one of two into which the main highway divided on either side of a handsome fountain built of yellow stones with red mural decorations and Arabic inscriptions. Two tall cypress-trees formed a fitting background, for the fountain was also a tomb. A pasha of past celebrity was buried within the walls. On both sides of the fountain were small courts or chambers open to the air, but surmounted with cupolas. Within one of these was a public oven ; in the other natives sat, grouped in picturesque attitudes, and giving inquisitive heed to the busy thoroughfare. A large tree afforded cool shade for wayside loungers and beggars on the opposite side of the road. Women carrying pitchers and boys fetching water for animals passed continually to and from the fountain.

Within the town while prowling through the bazaars we passed another fountain close to the mosque. It was of Saracenic origin built with stones and columns from the ancient fortress, Athlit; these and its surrounding court made the spot one of special interest. Thence through the winding steep lanes, flanked by many high blank-walled houses, we emerged on the sea front, and went into the quaint old monastery of the Armenians near the landing wharf.

A Greek priest showed us his own room, and a simple cell of a bedroom with recessed barred window. In the latter room was the column they call Napoleon's Column, because of the myth which relates how he stood leaning his arm against it at the moment when he is supposed to have given orders for the poisoning of the wounded and plague-stricken soldiers.

When one reflects to what a demoralised condition these fine troops of the Army of Italy—the pride of the young Napoleon—had sunk during the horrors of the last scenes before Akka, and the *débâcle* of that retreat to Jaffa, the wonder is that more tales of the kind have not become tradition. It is a matter of history that even the attendants of the sanatoria turned cowards, and robbed the sick before they were dead. It is also history that drugs were terribly scarce owing to the dishonesty of certain officials connected with that department—such scandals are constantly occurring in one department or another in the Army services of to-day—and that the doctors had to resort to herbal remedies which were accounted worse than poison by many a Jean Crapaud.

One of the most accurate of the many recorders of that tragic Syrian campaign remarks, in alluding to this very subject, that he could nowhere find proofs of this poisoning of the wounded, except in the countless propositions put forward by one and all, how best to prevent the hopelessly sick and wounded from falling into the cruel hands of the Turks. The majority of the sick were plague-stricken, and to convey each one, eight sound men were required, all of whom as bearers would have been liable to catch the fatal malady at any moment. Whether the order was actually given or not, the writer does not pretend to say; he gives the evidence, for and against, as an eye-witness of the campaign from beginning to finish, and leaves his readers to form their own judgment.

The voice of tradition in Jaffa has made Bonaparte guilty, not a surprising verdict when placed side by side with that other tragedy of the siege of Jaffa. I allude to the murder of the four thousand Turkish and Albanian soldiers, who laid down their arms as prisoners of the conquering general, and were killed in cold blood among the sand-dunes to the south of the town. The story is too well known to refer to by more than this passing remark.

From the sea-front by way of one of the narrow twisting alleys, which seem to lead nowhere and everywhere, we reached the south side of the headland and visited the house which is called that of Simon the Tanner. It has certainly very old foundations, and the situation is just above the tanneries of to-day, and where

they have been located for centuries. This site was shown formerly in the old Latin monastery on the quay, but opinion now favours the small house on the side of the cliff, some distance above the shore, looking down upon the remains of the ancient wall of the city.

There was an old, deep well on the flat roof where the stone was worn away by the constant tread of the foot when turning the wheel. There was also an ancient tank to be seen which had the three openings, such as are used in the tanning process. We crossed another small roof and mounted some worn stone steps, which were all attached to the ruins of a fort and the town wall, and we came out upon the so-called veritable site of Peter's vision, where the Moslems have erected a small mosque for prayer. The view out to sea over the barrier of rocks was beautiful and inspiring, and a rich recompense for the tediousness of the way to it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FROM THE WHITE TOWER OF RAMLEH TO THE HOLY CITY

THE plain of Sharon and a railway journey: this was the strange paradox of past and present conditions that the mind disliked to dwell upon, though later on we were able to appreciate the opportunity given on this route to Jerusalem for studying the variety of types of nationality and character continually passing to and fro. We resolved, nevertheless, to obtain a clearer idea of these age-famed pasturelands and the excellency of Sharon than could be gained by passing glimpses through the glass panes of a railroad car.

Early one morning—it was in the middle of February—we hired a native carriage and drove away from the town towards Ramleh, ten miles away in the midst of the plain. Mist lay lightly over the lowlands, clinging to the orange-groves, and lifting gradually as the sun ascending drew up, with fervent greeting to earth, the moisture lying on leaf and blade. The road was rugged and stony. Cactus-hedges bordered the groves till we left the suburb behind and drove out on the open plain.

The banks on either side, strewn with anemones, vivid spring verdure, and foliage, testified to the fertility

of the soil. Acres of young corn made oases of green in the land around, where camels at intervals were dragging the primitive plough through the rich red earth. Orchards shut in by the usual cactus barriers were everywhere in view, with trees of the almond, pomegranate, fig, and olive in every stage of growth. The blossom of the almond-trees showed varied tones of colour, from dainty pink to palest mauve and white, forming an exquisitely delicate contrast with the deep tone of the ploughed soil between the trees.

The first landmark of note was the ancient Weli Imam Ali with its six cupolas standing back from the roadside. Here we alighted that the horses might drink of the excellent water provided by an adjoining well. Farther on a camel barred the whole width of the highway by the extended length of the burden of fodder heaped upon its back. The owner made frantic efforts to divert it from the centre of the road, and the beast, taking the matter into kind consideration, solved the difficulty by striding across the wide ditch into the open country beyond.

We passed several villages, each with its fertile environment of olive, apricot, fig, and other fruit orchards. Owing to the undulating nature of the plain, which rises in places into small tells, natural high sites have been selected for these hamlets of the plain of Sharon which make them distinguishable from a distance. Everywhere between the olive-trees spread the blazing scarlet of the anemone, or on the margin of round drinking-pools, and bordering the dykes.

Two women at work in a field struck a bright note of colour across the green; one costume was of red and white, the other was a blue linen robe barred with vivid red embroidery. Both wore shawls of many colours tied carelessly round their heads, and they turned picturesque, glowing faces to view as the sound of carriage wheels struck their attention.

Every couple of miles we passed one of the old watch-towers built in 1860 to guard the route to the Holy City, but for which there is no necessity in these easier days of pilgrimage. From a long distance away we saw the White Tower of Ramleh standing up against the softly blue sky somewhat to the west of the massed grey roofs and cupolas, with minarets and tall palm-trees peering above the dense grey-green environs. We drew nearer and came upon spreading olive orchards which shut off the view of the town, while suddenly to the left was unfolded to gaze through the trees a Moslem graveyard with grey stones and piled boulders scattered everywhere in wild confusion.

We sent our carriage on to the town and then walked through the cemetery towards a walled enclosure within which stood the high tower. We entered and found ourselves in an immense quadrangle, formed like a huge khan by buildings all around, now in a sadly dilapidated state. On each of the four sides there had been ten recesses. The arches were broken, yet in their ruin made beautiful with moss, and feathery herbage growing over and between the masonry.

The whole quadrangle appeared to be undermined

with arched vaults into which we did not penetrate though we peered with curiosity down the ancient steps which descended to them from two sides of the court. The whole history of this ancient building and tower is obscured with varied versions of the founders and architects. Some authorities state that it is a mosque erected in the eighth century by the same khalif who founded the town of Ramleh; others assert that the mosque was built upon or reconstructed from a Christian church of greater antiquity. The Crusaders are credited with the building of the White Tower, though Saleh-ed-Din wrested Ramleh from them, restored the tower, and handed down to posterity the prestige of his name connected with it to this day.

In any case the whole building is remarkable even in ruins, and the tower is of such solid build that no earthquake has injured it in the least through all the centuries. We entered the arched doorway and went up the winding staircase of solid stone. At various intervals of the ascent of one hundred and ten steps, narrow passages led round to apertures in the tower walls, and to one or two small chambers. The upper part of the building tapered, till at the summit we came out upon a stone platform, unbarricaded, bare of all protection from the drop of two hundred feet to solid earth.

The view was superb. Far away north rose the pale blue ridge of Carmel, and the diaphanous, shadowy hills of Samaria rising up from the plain of the sea-coast. Southward to the desert stretched Philistia, the plain of Sefelah, broad, undulating, with low tells which had once

been crowned by cities famed of old. The hills of Judæa sending spurs into the plain barred the eastern view, and shut out with their rounded tops all view of the Holy City they enclosed. In the clear atmosphere, deep shadows of the gorges and defiles threw into prominence the modern villages, and ancient ruins clinging to many of the projecting crags. Across the plain westward rolled the green, purple, and rich brown waves of fertile land as far as the deep green belt of distant Jaffa, and the light sandy downs which bordered the long glistening strip of the Mediterranean Sea at the extreme horizon.

When the gaze returned reluctantly from the fair, wide-extending prospect and dropped to the immediate environment, there were gardens and orchards everywhere around, and the grey town with its minarets just beyond the wilderness of gravestones.

We remained some time in the quadrangle below, examining the arcades, and peeping through the arches of the walls and various loopholes for pictures of the plain. An ancient fountain had once ornamented the centre of the enclosure. Over the broken walls of yellow stones and bricks, creepers were growing thickly; from the foundations at one corner projected the roots of a big tree, its spreading branches veiled in the delicate shimmer of early spring growth. Scattered over the closely cropped verdure of the enclosure were stones and pieces of broken masonry. There were several old olive-trees of gnarled and picturesque growth dotted about.

Solitude dwelt in these old-world deserted precincts. It was a spot to dream in, to watch in fancy the kaleidoscopic procession of historical figures that had passed in successive ages through the principal entrance, that fine gateway once handsomely sculptured, by which we ourselves had entered the spacious area. Overhead was a sky of forget-me-not hue, veiled in parts with floating, ever-changing vapoury clouds. The grass still sparkled with dew. Lizards seemed the sole proprietors of the deserted ruins; they sprang through the herbage, glided over the tree-trunks, or thrust their big heads through interstices of masonry to reconnoitre before slipping down the wall into the grass.

We approached the town by winding lanes. Everywhere spread out plantations showing the varied spring hues of olive, pomegranate, and fig-tree, everywhere stretched the thorny barriers of cactus shrubs. Mulberry-trees grew in this vicinity as they did near the Auja; not the mulberry-tree cultivated for the silkworm culture, but the black-fruited mulberry-tree, high, spreading, and thickly foliaged.

Ramleh presented a venerable aspect. The buildings seemed ancient, and were in a ruined condition, yet interesting by reason of their age and Oriental atmosphere. We emerged from the narrow streets upon a large open space, big as a market-place in an old-fashioned English town. The highway crossed one end of the square, the other three sides were bordered by high blank walls with parapets of loopholes in the customary pyramidal clusters.

Above the wall to the left three cupolas lifted their heads. Farther up was an open gateway disclosing the old mosque, within which was once a Christian church, and is now so jealously guarded by the Moslems that even the offer of generous backsheesh will not always procure admittance. Near the road the old wall was broken down, disclosing acacia-trees and several eucalyptus-trees growing in a small plantation. Soldiers were sitting on the grass in the shade of the foliaged branches.

An ancient khan with a half-subterranean vaulted interior stretched down the centre of the square. The sides were banked with earth to the eaves. There were camels dimly visible within, and a few donkeys, while their owners squatted in the shade of the tumbledown walls. Palm-trees rose at intervals between the houses everywhere and behind the walls. Here was an archway through which one caught glimpses of a hidden garden beyond; there was a parapet overhung with foliage and creeping blossom; and now two women crossed the road with white skirts, saffron-coloured shawls, and the Moslem veils over their faces.

Beyond the continuous stretch of olive orchards, apricot, pomegranate, walnut, sycamore, and fig-trees, with the interwoven hedges of cactus, on the opposite side of the Jaffa road lay Lydda, the ancient Ludd, where our Richard the Lion-hearted built a famous church in honour of St. George. Lydda is the traditional birth-place of our patron saint.

It is curious how tradition has preserved no less than three versions of a story connected with some huge,

fearsome monster once the terror of the lowlands and this part of the coast. First in order comes the Biblical narrative of Jonah and the whale. Then there is the tale of the rescue of Andromeda by Perseus from her dangerous position on the rocks which guard the haven at Jaffa. This feat was accomplished by killing the monster, for whose pacification the maiden had been chained to a hole in one of the rocks pointed out by natives to this day. The third tradition relates to the slaying by Girgas, or George, of the Dragon which dwelt in the marsh near Ludd, only emerging from the reeds to drag off human victims to its horrid lair. Whether the ravages of malaria, or the storms caused by the "black north wind" of Josephus, were symbolised in the shape of a fabulous monster which needed to be lulled into passivity by propitiation or coercion, it is not possible to divine, but the three-fold tradition must certainly point to some definite basis for its original circulation.

Our next view of the plain of Sharon was from the train, which runs once daily between Jaffa and Jerusalem. It is generally crowded with passengers, native and foreign, at every season of the year, unless perhaps in the height of summer. Travellers travel first-class as the general rule, but after one experience of the kind we went preferably into the long cars resembling a tram-car with an additional bench running down the centre, for there one met with the greatest contrasts of type, colour, and character, and through the whole journey never had a dull moment. At first the natives appear

to one's unseasoned imagination to wear a fiercer, more aggressive aspect than one generally cares to encounter in a railway carriage, but experience soon teaches their harmlessness, and their ingenuousness is always interesting.

More than once I have watched natives who had never travelled in a train before. One poor old woman was half carried into the carriage, so powerless were her limbs and overcome her emotions, through the mere idea of an intimate connection with the smoke-spouting fiend, she entitled the locomotive. For more than half the way she remained crouched in a heap on the floor by her bundle of worldly belongings, utterly refusing to remove to the seat which was hers by right.

On one occasion, coming away from Jerusalem, it appeared as though we should be fellow-travellers with a troop of soldiers filling the length and breadth of the carriage into which the conductor ushered us. In a trice he cleared them all out with the exception of one, who went out and joined his comrades on the platform. They all kissed and embraced him affectionately in turn, and then he came back to the carriage. When the train started he hung half-way out of the window singing at the top of his voice in the minor tones of a weird Turkish melody.

"Ah, poor fellow," I remarked, "he is bewailing his enforced banishment from his beloved Jerusalem." For El Khuds is almost as dear to the Moslem as his Mecca.

Later I made discovery that he was chanting a *Jubilate* at seeing the last of it. His four years of

enforced military service were at an end, and he was returning rejoicing to his home in Damascus. What a paradise of precious fruits and laughing streams must his home town have appeared, in joyful anticipation, compared with the arid, rocky environs of his garrison city! His song continued throughout the journey, but luckily for our comfort he withdrew to the platform at the rear of the train at the first station, and hung over the rail there, reiterating his thanksgiving in tones that were consequently subdued though ever-persistent.

Friction occasionally arises owing to the arrogance of the Turks, and their attitude towards Christians and the ordinary Syrian-born. One day on the platform at the Jaffa railway station a heated dispute took place just outside a reserved first-class carriage in which were seated a few English travellers. It transpired that a Turkish official *en route* for Jerusalem had taken his seat in a single compartment specially reserved for a few Syrian women. He had no right to be there, but being a Turk he took advantage of his position. A railway official was on the platform and ordered him out of the women's compartment.

The Turk refused to emerge, and they exchanged heated remarks through the window. It was an animated scene, the voices sounding so excited and angry in tone that it seemed as if the men might come to blows at any moment. An Englishman stepped up and sided with the railway official.

He explained later that it was really a serious matter, for the Turk had no manner of right to intrude into

that carriage. The Turks themselves were the first to resent intrusion into their own harem on the train, therefore they should be made to pay similar respect to carriages reserved for Moslem women of any race. The matter ended by the Turk getting out of the harem.

The man who had made the commotion on the platform in the first place explained later that the Syrian lady, his sister, on whose account he had made the fuss, was quite European in her ideas; but if these encroachments were not checked, on any and every occasion, there would be no bound to Turkish insolence and intrusion.

"What induced the Turk to alight in the end?" we inquired.

"He was told quietly by a couple of the station authorities that if he remained obstinate they would not be responsible for anything that happened to him on the journey. He knew the desperate length to which a Syrian or Arab would go, once roused to white-heat by such an action, and discretion took the place of valour."

By this time we had emerged from the sand-banks edging the railway-track when it starts from Jaffa, crossed the level pastures, stopped at Lydda, had wound round to Ramleh station, and had begun to climb the rocky foot-hills of the mountains of Judæa. The whole aspect of the country quickly changed, yet interest grew keener and accumulated, for every mile of that stony, desolate ascent brought us nearer to the city of which every one dreams at one time or other of his life, the city into whose history, and round every stone with which it

has been built from the beginning, religion has woven more wonders, sentiment, and romance than in connection with any other spot in the whole wide earth.

Stony, bare hills stretched up on every side, showing gigantic rocks and wild, impressive gorges, as the track winding in and out brought each side in turn to full view from the train windows. The declivities seemed naturally terraced, sometimes to the summits, as if at one time they had been fashioned for the planting of vineyards, and then for centuries allowed to lie fallow and neglected. The small patches of verdure here and there in the beds of the wadis, or a straggling orchard of olive-trees, only made the bareness of the stony cliffs and heights more apparent by contrast.

The rains had failed that first springtime we travelled to Jerusalem, and even the ephemeral herbage, so vivid and verdant in that early upspringing after the grateful showers, had no sooner struggled into feeble life than the hot sun scorched and withered it. Here and there, however, a clump of pink cyclamen bravely rose between the stones by the railway track, or a few scattered red anemones.

There were only five stations, mere wayside sheds. To watch the daily transit of the trains, crowds of wild-eyed natives, all wearing the voluminous Moslem turban, stood near and peered in through the windows, to eye inquisitively every passenger. During the last hour of the journey we passed several villages built into the sides of the cliffs, and so similar in colour as to be scarcely distinguishable from their background.

Bittir, about six miles distant from Jerusalem, was built on a terrace close to the station ; and on a second terrace higher up the hill were traces of ruins, old cisterns, and rock chambers that are affirmed to be the remains of ancient Bether, that last stronghold of the Jews held valiantly against the assaults of the Roman army. The place was stormed after a terrible siege, and nothing more awful is recorded in the history of the Jews than the sacking of Bether, when the carnage was so persistent that the brook below is said to have run blood all the way to the sea—a story which makes the slaughter on the banks of the Kishon fade into insignificance.

Above were the hills of Bether, the outlines dark and bold against the evening sky, the hills to which the poet-king alluded when he said, "Turn my beloved, turn, and be thou like to a gazelle upon the mountains of Bether." Slowly we ascended the Valley of Roses —Wadi-el-Werd—the deep shades of the glen growing purple and mysterious as twilight dropped rapidly into night. When the train passed over the plain of Rephaim at the head of the wadi, the stars were out. We entered Jerusalem by moonlight.

CHAPTER XXIX

WITHIN AND AROUND THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM

IN spite of all I had read and heard of the extraordinary anomalies of modern Jerusalem, it was strange to witness by daylight the active movement on the glaring roads, the bewildering maze of pedestrians and vehicles, the new, staring buildings of the suburbs, the shrouding dust, and then try to associate the spot with impressive scenes of religious and historic interest. After a while, however, one began to recognise the Eastern figures in the motley crowd, the strings of loaded camels and other beasts of burden, the native drivers of the carriages, the endless variety of Oriental colours that blazed upon the eye under the white, blinding light of the Syrian sun.

The bustle and ceaseless traffic of a cosmopolitan, moving population was intensified at the time of our first visit to the Holy City. It was the season of the Greek Easter, when the greatest event of the year occurs, the reputed miraculous kindling of the Holy Fire within the Church of the Sepulchre. The great high-walled quadrangle of the Russian compound was black with countless figures of pilgrims whenever we passed through

the strong gates—always closed by night—into the enclosure. There were to be seen the fine Russian Consulate, the various hospices for the men and women pilgrims, the hospital, the mission-house, and the imposing church with its blue cupolas that rivalled the sky in hue. Many trees gave grateful shadow from the heat, and flowering shrubs and plants, carefully tended, gladdened the eye.

"To-day is the great day of all the year to the Greek and Russian Churches," I quote from a letter of my own written on the spot, "the day when the Holy Fire is kindled miraculously in the Holy Sepulchre itself within the walls of the Church of the Sepulchre, and the lights in every church far and wide will be rekindled from it. At the hour of two this miracle will take place. The whole church is thronged with pilgrims, many of whom have been in all night to keep their place. The square outside the church is also filled with a dense crowd. For the benefit of standing-room on a balcony, terrace, or at a window even poor pilgrims have been known to pay as much as a hundred francs. The whole area of the court and the face of the surrounding buildings is contracted so that every corner, crevice, ledge, roof, and projection is made use of. Human beings seem to perch on the walls like flies on a window-pane. Inside, the church-seats in the galleries cost anything from ten francs upwards. Turkish soldiers are on guard within and without the building to keep the peace between Christians who are packed together so closely that scarce have they breathing space. Directly

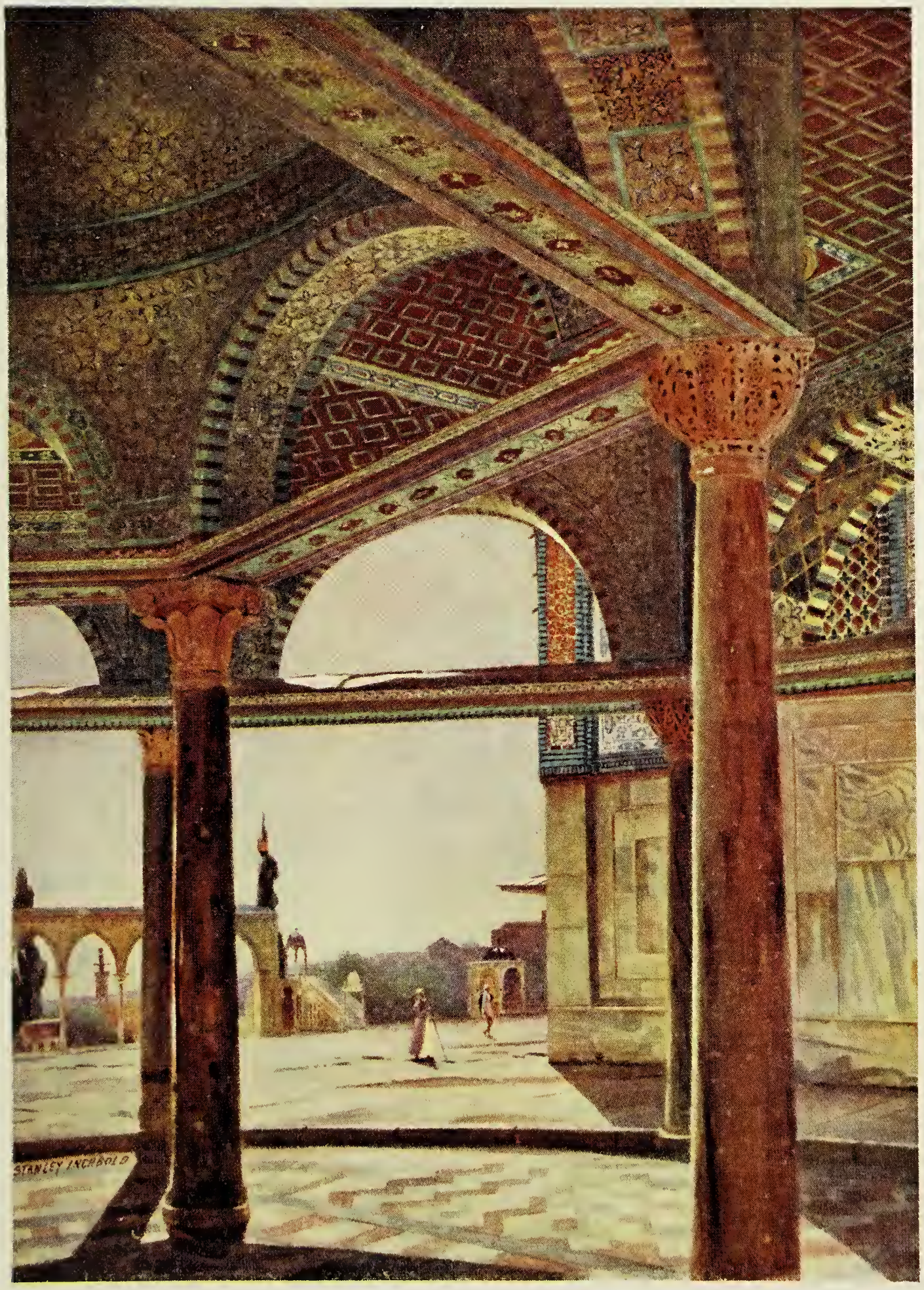
the heaven-kindled flame issues from an aperture in the Holy Sepulchre, there will ensue such a scene of frenzy as none who have seen it once will ever wish to witness again. For all in that densely thronged space will struggle to be first at the aperture with their tapers. The priests themselves are among the first to struggle to the front to light their tapers, and rush off to Bethlehem with the Holy Fire. Carriages are waiting at the Jaffa Gate just on the brow of the hill. I, myself, saw a priest race out of the city followed by dozens of others. He jumped into the nearest vehicle, the driver whipped up his horses, and away they flew in a cloud of dust, the priest guarding his taper with every care, that the flame might last through the drive of six miles to the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem. Others followed his example, for it is a race they have entered upon : whoever shall arrive the first wins a special fee for his pains. The crush was nearly as great at the ceremony of the washing of the feet, which takes place annually on the Thursday in Holy Week, in the same stone court fronting the Church of the Sepulchre. Here the Patriarch washes the feet of twelve bishops, speaking at the ceremony the same words that Christ used to His disciples. There is a separate towel provided for each of the bishops, and after the function is ended the pilgrims seize hold of the towels, kiss them frantically, rub them over their own faces, and treasure them as holy relics. On the sole of the bishops' feet the Patriarch makes the sign of the Cross with butter. The residue of the butter is also pounced upon by the pilgrims, who anoint themselves

with it as with something especially blessed. It is a pitiable sight."

Not only Christian pilgrims flock to Jerusalem at that season, but Moslems from near and far—Moslems of a fanatic type with many dervishes among them, to take part in a grand Mohammedan pilgrimage to the tomb of Moses (En-Nebi-Mûsa). Fanaticism heats the very air ; party spirit runs high ; at any hour it seems as though the overcharged religious emotions may burst into dangerous eruption. Moslem authorities in high places are said to encourage the enthusiasm attached to this pilgrimage, which is taken from the walls of El-Khuds to the shrine in the wilderness of Judæa. The increasing number of Christian votaries at Easter-time alarms them ; the balance of power and safety is maintained, they think, by the addition to their own party of the Moslem pilgrims.

From the Mount of Olives, or the slope of Mount Scopus, the city of Jerusalem presents itself as a vast picture which, as well as supremely gratifying to the eye, satisfies the mental conception one has formed of its unique site, upon hills surrounded by hills. The deep vale of the Kedron separates Olivet from the steep grey slopes of Mount Moriah, which rise precipitously opposite.

On the summit is the most striking feature of the whole city, the long platform of the Temple area with tapering columns of sombre cypress-trees showing above the cyclopean walls of the enclosure. One of the most beautiful buildings in the world, the Mosque of Omar



The Dome of the Chain, Temple Area.

or Dome of the Rock, stands in conspicuous prominence on a small elevation of the same platform.

This famed sanctuary of the Moslems—which, notwithstanding its beauty, comes far below the splendour of the Temples of Solomon and Herod—covers the wonderful rock, the crown of Moriah, one of the most impressive sights in the whole of Palestine. Rugged and massive, more than fifty feet long and forty-four feet wide, this rocky summit of the sacred mount rises seven to eight feet above the mosaic pavement beneath the imposing dome. It is the rock upon which Abraham offered his sacrifice; it is the site of the great altar of burnt-offering.

A few paces from the east door of the mosque is a beautiful cupola supported by two concentric rows of graceful marble pillars, constructed in such a fashion as to enable all to be visible at one time. No finer colouring is to be seen in the whole of the Haram than is shown in the mosaics and architecture of this perfect little structure, which is supposed by the Moslems to have been erected as a model for the big mosque. It has two names: the Judgment Place of David, and the Dome of the Chain.

From the restful seclusion of the Temple platform with its stretches of green, its trees, domes, minarets, and the subdued purple and gold colouring of the Mosque El Aksa, the gaze passes on to the whole dense mass of Oriental terraced roofs, towers, cupolas, campaniles, "built as a city compact together" behind the high battlemented walls. You feel that you want to see

that whole outstretched picture flooded in the full light of sunrise with every shadow strongly marked in purple relief. You long to see it when the dark shades are mounting from the Kedron valley, and the western sky is transformed into a glorious background of radiant heavenly colour, against which "the city of the great king, beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth" stands out with regal distinction, its high places touched to gold in the amber of sunset rays.

The craggy eminence known as Gordon's Calvary is situated opposite the north wall of the city not far from the Damascus Gate. Several authorities are of opinion that this low cliff, owing to its peculiar formation, is the original Golgotha, the place of a skull, and that a rock-tomb discovered at the base of the hill is the real Holy Sepulchre. This site outside the city wall, with only the high road and a small garden between at the foot, certainly appeals more strongly to mental associations than the traditional *holy places* shown in the Church of the Sepulchre.

Many the time during our various visits to Jerusalem I found my way to the little hill and remained there, gazing over the city which, though not the Jerusalem of Solomon or of Herod, was yet peculiarly suggestive of both in the irregular outlines of the terraced roofs, the colouring, the Oriental foliage shooting upwards from the courts or from within the parapets, the houses built up from the battlements of the ramparts. Even when strong doubt was thrown upon the theories by which General Gordon had come to his belief concerning the

Holy Sepulchre, the site still had power to kindle into life stirring memories and images of the wondrous story which, though nigh upon two thousand years old, remains ever new in its supreme, Divine hold upon human hearts.

The hill sloped gently on the off-side thickly strewn with Moslem gravestones to a rugged lane bordered by a high, strong wall. This was the eastern boundary of the extensive grounds of the Dominicans. The entrance gates were in the wall of enclosure skirting the Nablons road, which started at the Damascus Gate and ran directly north.

The monastery and church were built upon old sites. The necessary excavations brought to light many beautiful mosaics, sculptory, and ancient tombs. St. Stephen, according to tradition, was martyred on this site, and not on the rocky, bare spot about one hundred and fifty yards below St. Stephen's Gate, which is generally pointed out as marking the scene of stoning. The Basilica built by the Empress-saint Eudoxia once occupied the spot where the fine Dominican church of St. Stephen now stands. It was destroyed by the Arabs in the seventh century, but the present edifice has been planned on the same design, the position of the aisles, pillars, and the apse having been quite evident.

There were all kinds of relics of the splendid building discovered, and the whole enclosure of the monastery grounds was strewn with ruins, and the findings of the excavators. The most interesting discovery was that of a number of ancient tombs in splendid preservation, to which we descended by a flight of steps.

The subterranean chambers and corridors were extensive. The suite of tombs communicated by a short passage—then blocked up—with the tomb at the foot of Calvary, but they were all more elaborate and complete than the isolated one. The knowledge that the garden tomb of Gordon's discovery had once been included in that little necropolis confirmed my opinion that the site of the original Holy Sepulchre in the Garden of Joseph of Arimathæa, hewn out of the rock, and wherein no man had ever yet been laid, never has been discovered, and never will be discovered by mortal man, search where and how he may.

Just within the gate of St. Stephen, in the eastern wall of the city, an archway to the right leads into the court of the Church of St. Anne, the alleged site of the birthplace of the Virgin Mary. A grotto beneath the church holds a modern cradle with transparent pink curtains through which glimmers rosily a waxen babe in repose. We visited the place one day, and from the church crossed to an iron gateway and paid half a franc each for entrance to ruins of a small church within, and several dilapidated houses overgrown with creepers and flowers, making up a wild, picturesque reality which pleased after the artificial atmosphere of the church.

Tapers were lighted, and we descended with caution two flights of broken, very slippery stone steps. There, at the base, in what looked like a dim, half-subterranean vault, we saw water silently lapping the soil at our feet.

It was the Pool of Bethesda, the water into which the visits of angels had once stirred daily virtue of

THE POOL OF HEZEKIAH, JERUSALEM.

beneficent healing. Was it in reality the survival of the original pool of healing that lingered darkling in that ancient, rock-hewn hollow? Who could tell! It seemed real and vital, and as every true site of the ancient landmarks must necessarily be deep below ground to-day the position and other data seemed in accord. There are those who assert they can trace remains of the Five Porches in the ruined masonry standing around, but it seemed to me that there were simply vestiges of a small church, erected in olden days over the sacred pool. There is another reputed Pool of Bethesda on the north side of the Temple area, which appears to be a vast chasm, half filled with débris and rubbish of every description. Some authorities are inclined to the opinion that it is part of the great fosse which protected the Castle of Antonia on the north, adding to the elevation of its towers.

The great reservoir called the Pool of Hezekiah lies low between the houses near the Jaffa Gate. It is two hundred and fifty feet long and one hundred and fifty wide. I viewed it first of all from the roof of the old Mediterranean Hotel opposite the Citadel and the Tower of David. To the north rose the plain, massive wall of the Coptic khan. Opposite were the backs of the houses of Christian Street, their quaint covered balconies, galleries, and latticed windows rich in colour and strong shadows. The city itself spread out one confused mass of roofs, cupolas, and minarets, out of which rose prominently the domes of the Church of the Sepulchre and the Mosque of Omar. The long

ridge of Mount Olivet with the Russian campanile on its summit was the background of the picture.

Suddenly the Turkish band struck up below, and from the barracks beneath the Tower of David there emerged a whole regiment of the Sultan's soldiers. They marched down the Street of David, a narrow sukh lined with shops of every description. Crowds of Arabs followed them on their way to prayer in the Harâm-esh-Sherîf.

Full of deep interest to my mind were the extraordinary excavations known as the Quarries of Solomon to some people, as the Cotton Grottoes to the Moslems. The entrance to them is within a few minutes' walk of the Damascus Gate, nearly opposite Gordon's Calvary, by means of a door which conceals the opening in the solid rock of the precipice some twenty feet beneath the city wall.

For centuries these quarried caverns remained hidden from knowledge of all men until they were accidentally re-discovered in the year 1852. Authorities agree in opinion as to their great antiquity. Josephus is supposed to have made allusion to them in his description of Jerusalem and the walls, which at this north side "passed by the sepulchral caverns of the kings." The excavations appear to have been worked in a south-easterly direction so far as to extend beneath part of the Temple area.

As we stepped into the cavernous interior, the gloom by contrast with the brilliant sunshine, and the glare on the white high-road was sudden and intense, the atmosphere chill, the track sloped southwards at a steep

gradient ; stones and fragments were scattered right and left, rugged blocks rose out of the shale. The ground beneath the feet was heavy for walking ; the accumulations of centuries of chippings had crumbled to powder, deep and thick as the sands of Sahara.

The interior seemed of immense dimensions. Strong effects of light and shade were created by the flickerings of the tapers we held in our hands. At one moment the rough-hewn roof, some thirty feet high, was cast into menacing obscurity, at the next sudden light was thrown on the vertical flutings left in the rocky walls by the ancient method of quarrying.

At the foot of the long descent where pits of yawning blackness seemed to be lying in wait for our unwary footfalls, the rocks on either side withdrew to form a spacious cavern. The walls were seamed everywhere by the same parallel grooves, made by the process of detaching the blocks of stone by means of wedges. At first glance, however, the eye received an impression of closely knit pillars, as in a cathedral, decorating the whole interior.

Masons' marks were in evidence, marks which had made known to researchers the size and shape of the tools once employed. Here and there were shapeless columns of the rock, and in the centre of this large excavation was a massive pillar that had been left by the quarrymen to support the overhanging roof.

We wandered as in a dream from one cave to another, now climbing the rocks that lay across our track, now skirting the ledge of a giant boulder, or thrusting a way,

ankle-deep, through a fine powdery bed of chippings, while on all sides gaunt rocks projected and lined the route. Some of the stones were cut, others were in the rough, while many left half cut in the walls gave an appearance of arches artificially built in the quarries.

Niches were visible at intervals which had held the earthen lamps of the ancient miners. The farther we penetrated into the heart of these caverns the greater waxed my wonder at the vastness of the excavations concealed beneath the city until so recent a date.

Now a hush stole upon the party. We were approaching a spot to which tragedy had attached itself. The quarries are dangerous to explore, without the guidance of some one familiar with the various pitfalls and winding passages. Twenty or more years ago, when the caverns were more difficult of access than to-day, an American had risked entering them alone. He carried only his taper with him, and went there with the object of exploring the interior minutely, on his own account, trusting solely to his personal guidance.

He was missed, searched for diligently, and found several days later, dead, at the base of a steep declivity over which it was presumed he had fallen. It was conjectured that he had not provided himself with matches to renew his light if it had failed. Doubtless it had become extinguished at a critical moment, for in some of the interior vaults the air is heavy ; the light flickers, grows pallid, and would quickly die out if not quickly withdrawn to a more open space. It was an accident that might easily have overtaken any one

unfamiliar with the labyrinth of bewildering tracks. Evidently the adventurous wanderer had gone astray in the blackness of that sepulchral cavern, and slipped over the declivity which was of a height only dangerous under such unfortunate conditions.

By a circuitous passage through the rocks we descended, and emerged in the hollow of the excavation, where, as if in mockery of the tale of death, there lay in conspicuous relief on the white surface of the rock the large thigh-bone of some animal. It is a fact that vestiges of diversified nature have been discovered at intervals in remote recesses of the quarry, such as bits of ancient pottery, of charcoal, and bones of human beings as well as of animals.

The largest of the caverns was round in shape, and most wonderfully domed. It formed a natural auditorium that might easily have been converted into a subterranean temple, or hall of justice. The proportions were vast and imposing, and from it were various outlets into passages and smaller caves. The rocky walls were remarkably white and would, doubtless, have polished well.

This unique subterranean interior is used by Freemasons, who come to Jerusalem from all parts of the world, for an important meeting-place. Pieces of the rock are being constantly carried away to be converted into emblems of the Order. Large blocks have been shipped to America at times to form foundation-stones for Masonic lodges in different parts of the States.

The Freemasons are of firm persuasion that this

so-called Cotton Grotto of the Arabs is none other than the original royal quarry from which Solomon commanded stones to be hewn for his wonderful Temple—for that splendid vision of polished white stones and plates of gold, created without sound of hammer, axe, or any tool of iron while it was in process of building. They say that it was none other than the quarrymen of Hiram, their first Grand Master, who worked in these subterranean depths under the city, that was to be made famous by the Temple of Solomon; that they were the men who drove the wedges into the niches, and poured the water upon the wood so that it might split the rocks into slabs, ready to be hewn into fitting form for use in the wonderful edifice.

"Now the whole structure of the temple was made with great skill of polished stones, and those laid together so harmoniously and smoothly," says Josephus, "that there appeared to the spectators no sign of any hammer, or other instrument of architecture, but as if the entire materials had naturally united themselves together, that the agreement to one part with another seemed rather to have been natural, than to have arisen from the force of tools upon them."

Whether this belief of the Freemasons be based on truth or not, it is certain that Phœnician lettering and numerals are visible among the marks which abound in the quarries, imprinted on the rock surfaces in red paint, that has remained indelible through the centuries. Certainly, the silence everywhere was profound. Not a murmur from the outside world above penetrated that

underground labyrinth. There was no echo from one cavern to the other. A stone thrown from a height dropped with a dull, non-vibrant thud.

"And the house when it was in building was built of stone made ready at the quarry," relates the Biblical chronicler of the great king's achievements, "and there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building."

When by a mere accident these quarries were re-discovered, those words which tell of the silent building seemed to be verified. On the Temple area itself surface openings could have been made, through which the blocks and slabs of quarried stone, which harden when exposed to the air, were raised in readiness for actual construction.

Water surrounded the stones in a recess towards which one could only advance by climbing. Stepping between and over the stones I drew near the recess, held the lighted taper beneath a natural arch in the rock, and peering within discovered, in concealment behind the breastwork of stone, a well of water. Water dripped also from above. There was a crystalline incrustation on the rocks where the moisture had trickled through. In many places the rock glistened as if frosted, and stalactites hung from the roof. Here and there the white surfaces were tinged with deep iron stains, as if some vein of ore ran through the stony strata.

Impressions of colour, curiously enough, were received at every turn by the eye. The creamy hues were flushed with pink, the stones had deep purple shades.

The very gloom itself was charged with dignity and a solemn mystery. Though heavy, the air was cool, and constantly the total absence of reverberation occurred to the mind. We might have been pacing some phantom halls in the "unsubstantial realms" of Hades.

In other ways than with red paint man had left his mark in many places on the rocks by means of the smoke from his candle. Names of every nationality had been traced in this way, with the date of their owners' visit to this under-world.

In the year 1885 these quarries became the scene of a peculiar visitation. A party of Germans from Saxony, including men, women, and children, came on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. They were led thither by a miner who had become possessed with the delusion that Anti-Christ—who was to be the Arch-Fiend incarnate—was to be born in the Holy City to challenge defiance to the whole of Christendom.

This Saxon miner had worked upon the imagination of his compatriots by professing to have direct communication with Satan, and so impregnated the deluded people with his ideas that they willingly left their homes, and travelled under conditions of acute hardship to the Syrian coast. His followers readily confessed at a later date, when in great straits, that they, themselves, had never seen the Evil One though his voice had often been audible at their meetings when holding conversation with their leader. It was suggested by the narrator of this story that the man may have been a born ventriloquist.

When they arrived in Jerusalem it was in Solomon's

quarries, of all places, that the whole community took up their abode. Whether the effect of the gloom and weirdness of environment weakened their peculiar interest in this abnormal cult was not related, but at any rate dire extremity soon compelled the votaries to apply for assistance to others of their country-people settled in Jerusalem ; and to the American colony, a community, bearing the name of the "Overcomers," which never fails to come to the aid of the needy and sick in their distress.

There was no hesitation about "renouncing the devil and all his works" once the whole situation became clear to the deluded Saxons, and money was promptly subscribed by the charitable to send the whole party back to their own country. What became of the leader nobody seemed able to explain. His end is wreathed in the smoky atmosphere of a mysterious disappearance like that of Faustus, and of many a real and fictitious character whose enterprises have been conducted in the leading-strings of Mephistopheles.

CHAPTER XXX

A DAY OF FESTIVAL IN A MOSLEM HAREM

WE drove in at the Damascus Gate with the caution required by the sharp turn of the vaulted entrance. The sun blazed in a sapphire sky, reflecting a blinding glare on the white walls as we wound through the tortuous byways of the Via Dolorosa. The Turkish barracks was ahead with its blue and pink façade. Right and left opened mysterious vistas beneath dimly lighted archways. At the foot of a steep street in the bed of the Tyropean Valley we alighted and passed under the deep archway of a passage flagged underfoot. A high wall soon barred the way ; to the right were broad steps conducting to a piazza on which were seated a group of Turkish gentlemen sitting on low stools and chairs.

One of these rose hurriedly to his feet as he caught sight of us and clattered down the steps to bid us hearty welcome. He shook hands with effusion, begging us to regard his house as our own, as he indicated with a gesture the stone staircase to the left of the passage we had passed through. Our host was the father of the boy for whom this festival was being celebrated, and the husband of the lady by whose invitation we had come.

TOWER OF ANTONIA, VIA DOLOROSA.

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We mounted the steps, which soon turned at an abrupt angle, climbed the remaining stairway, and we saw before us an open doorway through which came sounds of revelry, tambourine and stringed instruments.

The interior appeared to be a large room at a first glance, but once we entered it proved to be a flagged court upon which opened several rooms. It was walled high, honeycombed with loopholes in pyramidal piles at regular intervals, through which women can see without being themselves observed. Overhead was a bellying canopy of drapery coloured red, white, and blue, and embossed in bold outlines of arabesque. The flapping roof served the double purpose of screen from sun and human observation.

We passed through an undistinguishable throng of women and children, dressed in every colour of the spectrum. A double line of divans one above the other lined the lengths of two walls. The wall running up from the doorway was centred by a cushioned platform upon which the musicians were seated facing the most distinguished of the visitors, who reclined on the mattresses opposite. Two doorways divided the double row of divans.

To the right of the first door, seated upon the divan, her back braced against a window-ledge, was a dignified lady whom, at first glance, I mistook for the hostess. She was, however, the most distinguished of the guests, the wife of a government official next in rank to the pasha.

Her costume was of white brocade fitting closely

to a shapely figure. The elbow-sleeves and low square of the bodice were trimmed with an embroidery of mauve, green, and silver. White lisse in semi-transparent folds filled in the square, while round her firm, white throat was tied a band of green ribbon. A sash of the same spring-green shade girdled the waist. She wore a spray of diamonds in her berthe, and also in her hair, which was coiffed high with waved fringe. She was a Turkish lady whose acquaintance with Parisian or Viennese fashion was more extended than that of the ordinary Moslem lady of Jerusalem.

With cordial dignity she gave us welcome. Some of our party who had already arrived were seated near her, on the divan at her feet, and one or two on stools, so that when our contingent of three was added to the number, the colonel's lady became a queen in the midst of her maids-in-waiting.

And now, seated quietly on a camp-stool, of which there was ample provision for those who could find no vacant spot on the divans, it was possible to survey the scene of striking interest to Europeans. At least a hundred people were present including children, though not those in arms, which were legion. Every guest appeared to have her baby and attendant, who at intervals brought her charge to be refreshed by the mother. The divans evidently ranked as the dress-circle of the scene in progress. The space between this and the elevated position of the musicians was the arena, occupied by a motley crowd of guests, who gesticulated, clapped their hands, and were energetic in their cries of approval.

Upon chairs and camp-stools, arranged pell-mell, all were seated in confused huddle, arrayed in every conceivable costume from plain muslin or cotton wrappers to the stiffest of rich silks and satins.

The doorway and space within were filled by a crowd of a different degree, standing erect, squatting on the floor, or occupying a wooden bench placed against the wall. Here, black faces with ivory teeth and rolling eyes beamed on the general scene. Their owners generally held enfolded in their arms a little bundle of humanity whose soft top-knot of dark hair peeped out of the handsome shawl in which the baby had been lulled to sleep. The nurses were elbowed by other servants, in picturesque embroidered costumes of deep blue linen, who moved around with the stateliness of young queens. Their lustrous brown faces with friendly eyes looked handsome and striking beneath the coronet of large metal coins encircling their heads, and their luxuriant dark hair parted in the centre gave a Madonna-like outline of visage and expression. A three-cornered flat head-dress, the same colour as the costume, worked in intricate arabesque of gold, orange, and blue, was attached to the coronet of coins. The costume was one peculiar to several Moslem villages north of Jerusalem.

But the colours in the arena were nondescript and dull when contrasted with the vivid hues worn by the ladies on the divan. Brilliant pink was the favourite colour in combination with blue, or other shades of rose from pale salmon to cerise, all manifested in material

of costly brocades and other figured silks. Gowns were made in any and every fashion from a plain, long robe extending from shoulder to feet in flowing line, to a tight-fitting bodice, waistband, and trained skirt. My gaze was drawn to a brilliant scarlet silk garment enveloping a figure of matured ripeness, merely restrained in exuberant display by a narrow ribbon confining a waist of unguessed proportions. Through the folds of the skirt were indicated the stumpy little knees in position the reverse of elegant. Travelling upwards the eye viewed a small flat head with plain features overhung by a straggling fringe, and eyes sunken and dull that squinted abominably. It was a married woman, her baby but a couple of months old. That was the face viewed by the unsuspecting husband when, the marriage ceremony completed, he had been allowed to feast his eyes for the first time on the fabled loveliness of his bride.

But this was not a fair type of the feminine element present. The type most prevalent was of medium height, of plump and pleasant symmetry of figure, deficient only through lack of physical culture. For colouring, a complexion of pale olive, eyes dark and large with a tendency to curve upwards at the corners like Japanese eyes. The nose was shapely though thick, the mouth straight in line, and unrelaxing except in obedience to mood or temper. The hair was black and straight, dressed high with coiled knot, and untidy fringe.

Easily could one pick out among the number those who had received advantage of some education under European training. Their figures were disciplined, they

held themselves erect, and sat on chairs or stools. Their expression had depth. Faculties of observation and disposition, still latent in others, manifested by the dumb wistfulness of many a dark eye, had been called into action.

Near me sat a young bride, Turkish by birth, her hands tattooed with weird marks of triangles, dots, and so forth in the fashion of the country. She did not like the custom—to her mind it was a disfigurement—but married to a Syrian she had to resign herself to the unavoidable. Her creamy skin, large melting eyes, soft contour of chin and cheek, and becomingly coiffured head would have made her a beauty anywhere, apart from the fact that her figure was good, that she walked well, and was dressed in excellent taste in the two costumes she adopted during the day. When I first caught sight of her she was garbed in rich black silk and a white lace bolero; a few scarlet and white flower petals were scattered in the soft meshes of black hair according to another Syrian custom. Later in the day she wore a costume of pale blue trimmed with filmy white lace, which enhanced her white-toned skin to the texture of dazzling fairness.

The mothers of the young wives still retained, in great measure, their old habits. They wore simple costumes, such as figured muslin wrappers, or gowns simply girdled; their hair was covered with a square of worked muslin placed cornerwise on the parting, and the other ends tucked under the hair behind. The daughters dressed their hair in modern style, and wore blouses and skirts, or Princess robes.

The daughters of the house appeared at intervals to convince themselves that the Inglizi visitor lacked nothing to comfort and enjoyment. In a few minutes after taking our seats a delicate-looking, refined woman with blue eyes, and dark brown hair dressed in the nape of the neck, advanced to our side from the other end of the court holding a handsome tray in her hands. She walked with self-possession, her long train of white moiré silk adding dignity to her appearance. It was our hostess, at last, who approached to offer each one of us lemonade served in long-stemmed iridescent glasses. With mien of smiling, gracious dignity she remained near until we could replace the glasses on the tray, an action indicative of peculiar attention to honoured guests. The eldest daughter was married, of hearty, good-natured manner, as exuberant in spirit as in figure. She had an abundance of dark waved hair, and was handsomely attired in flowing Princess robe of mauve-figured silk, trimmed with chiffon of paler hue. Wherever her spirit of hospitality induced her to hover temporarily, she introduced a gay, breezy element.

Another daughter bade fair to be a replica of the married sister, though she still wore her hair loose, tied simply with a knot of bright ribbon. She bore herself with an air of great responsibility, speaking rapidly and energetically when with us, as though giving herself respite from the cares of entertaining so large and varied a party. Once she turned to me with a bright smile, speaking a few impressive words.

"She wants you to enjoy yourself, to have a really

good time," said the lady who had brought me to the house.

"Tell her I am very happy, enjoying myself immensely." I smiled in return. In reply I received a few words with a little ceremonious air.

"She hopes you will often have happy hours, and many happier hours than this," was again interpreted. As I smiled my acknowledgment of the pretty speech a small cup of coffee appeared on a tray at my side. A cup was broken during the day by a visitor, who was told that the Mohammedans considered it very lucky for china to be broken accidentally at a wedding or any feast.

The third daughter was a slim, miniature edition of the two elder sisters, carrying herself with the reserved dignity of the mother. She was in pink silk with trained skirt, her dark hair drawn back into two thick plaits hanging far below her dainty waist. She was probably about fifteen years of age, the other two respectively seventeen and twenty. Intelligence and power of observation sparkled in her dark eyes. Her lips, delicately pencilled into a perfect bow, were firmly set. She looked of determined character, fully equal to the responsibility of pink silk and a long train.

The heat in the court was intense, and the water-jar was in constant request. One of the daughters came round accompanied by a native servant, who carried the jar while her mistress presented the glass in turn to any in need of the refreshing draught. All this while

the noise and din of the strange musical instruments was deafening, added to the chatter of voices and the nasal twanging strains of the singer musicians.

"They are dancers hired expressly from Beyrout for the occasion," whispered my neighbour.

"Of what nationality?" I inquired.

"Jewish. They are engaged for the whole festival of ten days, and sing and play and dance all day and more than half the night. They are treated right royally, given five napoleons a day, each one of them, with food and lodging. The boy has given the dark-haired one who plays the lyre a beautiful silk gown, and the three have had handsome presents."

Twang! Twang! tweaked the lyre. Jingle! Ding-a-ding! rang out the castanet. Drum-a-drum, drum-a-drum! tattoed the dark-skinned Syrian to the left, her fingers and knuckles belabouring the parchment of the tambourine.

Two of them, very smartly dressed, belonged to a mixed company of dancers, but the men of the party, not allowed to play or dance in the harem, were now entertaining the men guests on the other side of the house. The third performer, busy with the tambourine and taking the part of the usual male performer, was hired locally. On the tenth day, when the rite of circumcision was to take place, the women dancers would also perform before the men guests—meanwhile they entertained the ladies of the harem.

The hired addition to the party caught first attention. She appeared a Bedawin type of woman.

"Is she a Bedawin?" I inquired quietly.

"No, just an ordinary Moslem woman. However, she may be of gypsy blood," was the reply.

I thought the same, as she might have been the twin-sister of Suleiman, the dweller in tents who called himself a Bedawin but was in reality a gypsy, whom we visited in the neighbourhood of Jaffa. Two faces more alike in expression and feature it would be difficult to find. Long straight features, oval, almost pointed face with a singular sweetness and reticence in the compressed lips. The wiliness of the serpent in the deep glancing eye, jet-black set in clear white. Her black hair was cut in a fringe over a high brow, but the mass of it hung over her shoulders in two thick plaits interwoven with coloured braid. She was dressed in a loose muslin blouse, white strewed with lilac blossom, the lavender hue deepening the olive of the dark clear skin. She sat in a heap on the divan half turned to the lyre-player, her profile in view, possessing an uncanny fascination, drawing the eyes back to contemplation again and again, to investigate the meaning of the quietly smiling mouth, the sphinx-like gaze of the deep eyes.

The costumes of the Beyrout performers were normal as that of artistes at a variety entertainment in the provinces. It was in details that Oriental tastes made itself conspicuous. The leader was of accepted Semitic type, her black hair, waved, puffed out, and decorated with red-and-white flower petals, her fair skin whitened with powder, the dark eyes lengthened and narrowed by kohl-stained shadows. The plump face wore a perpetual

languishing, simpering smile, that broadened to a laugh when the words of the song required emphasising. She sat cross-legged on the divan, holding the instrument between her knees, manipulating the strings with an ivory plectrum.

Suddenly she threw back her head and closed her eyes with the expression of a small child on the verge of a piercing scream; she also opened her mouth, but it was not the expected scream that emerged but the twanging, nasal notes of an Arab love-song. The words were unintelligible, sound being the chief factor appreciated, with action of face to typify various emotions. With every other word there came a vigorous accompaniment of tambourine and castanet, the two companions lending their voices at intervals with ear-piercing effect. At the singer's feet tumbled about a small miniature of herself, a pretty child with a curly mop of hair.

The third performer was a young woman arrayed in a red plush gown and creamy lace. Her brown hair, dressed low in the nape of the neck and parted in front in crimped profusion, was also strewn with flower petals and gold tinsel, a coiffure becoming to the long delicate face from which a pair of brown eyes gazed indifferently on the scene before her with a veiled expression that never varied throughout the day. She made no effort to captivate her audience such as made by the smiling lyre-player. She sang ever in the same dirge-like, monotonous strain, smiling not at all, her expression remaining critical and indifferent.

Perched near them on the high divan was a girl of

ten in a pretty blue frock, her hair waved and hanging over her shoulders. She took keen interest in the singers and was evidently granted great liberty of action. The one distinction between her and an English child lay in the fact that her hair was adorned with a handsome tiara of sparkling diamonds. I was told she was the colonel's daughter, her mother the lady near whom I sat.

The children were in fact masters of the whole situation. Every guest seemed to have brought with her both family and servants. Beads and jewellery were worn by all the little girls. The boys were dressed in two styles : in a suit with trousers giving them the look of dwarfed men, or in coloured kaftan girdled with sash, the inevitable fez as headgear for both costumes.

Several young wives looked shyly and nervously at me when I watched them and their babies. "Are they afraid of the evil eye?" I inquired privately.

"No, it is the blue eye they fear in that respect, but they are afraid you are admiring their babies. It is considered very ominous if any compliments are paid."

The speaker got up and took one of the babies in her arms. The mother willingly relinquished it.

"Bismallah!" said the lady in a loud voice as she kissed and cuddled the little brown morsel. "If you pronounce the name of God over a child it averts all evil in their simple minds," she said aside to me. "Alway say 'Bismallah' when you look at a baby and the mother will smile at you."

At intervals a boy of ten bolted into the midst of the gay company. He would stay for a few moments talking

with an air of hurry to one or other of his boy friends, then, casting furtive, hasty glances, anywhere and nowhere, he would push his way through, disappearing beneath the archway conducting to the inner part of the building. Spectators also crowded this opening: peasant-women, Abyssinians, and a few unassuming Mohammedan women in cotton wrapper and plainly plaited hair. The boy who popped in and out of sight, like a Jack-in-the-box, was the hero of the feast, who seemed anxious to suppress himself, with the same contempt for fuss and womenfolk as the average Western boy of his age. He was dressed in uniform with brass buttons, and very shabby uniform at that. It was too early in the day for the new clothes.

Now ensued a gradual thinning of the crowd. The groups by the entrance dwindled. The uninvited, those who had strolled thither attracted by sounds of revelry from the street, departed in quest of the noontide meal. It was whispered that dinner was served, that we should speedily be invited to the meal. While in momentary expectation of the summons an old woman in long blue wrapper, and a kerchief over her grey hair, which was divided into two thin short plaits, came into the court panting for breath. She looked inquisitively around, pushed her way forward puffing and grumbling through toothless gums, and planted herself on a chair facing the double row of divans.

The silk and satin-arrayed matrons eyed her with astonishment that merged into good-natured merriment, and giggling whispers, as the old woman flung off her

wrapper with energetic action, and began to fan herself vigorously with a portion of it. The garment disclosed clinging closely to her figure was of figured cotton.

"She is only a beggar from the street," I was told, "and the ladies are intensely amused at her audacity in planting herself before them instead of keeping modestly near the door."

No one who comes uninvited to a festival is turned away from a Mohammedan dwelling when they come merely to look on, and the old woman was allowed full liberty. In fact, no sooner was the lower divan to the right vacated by a couple of ladies who withdrew into an adjoining chamber, than the old body flung herself on the mattress and looked round to see where she could next attract attention. Unfortunately it was my eye she caught, whereupon she addressed herself with great volubility to me, as she supported each of her legs in turn, holding them tenderly as one suffering great pain, then in similar fashion indicating that every place on her body was racked with excruciating pain.

Just at that moment I was told to accompany my friends to the dinner, or her plaintive appeals, disregarded, might at any instant have been transformed to abuse, which would have been considered an ominous happening on such an occasion.

Within the room I just mentioned portmanteaux and bags of all kinds were lying about. Speculation concerning them was satisfied upon the reappearance of the ladies who had temporarily withdrawn. They were in fresh costume, gayer and smarter than those

discarded. Throughout the day the guests all changed their costumes at least three or four times, giving fresh colour and interest to the changing scene, from their own and the strangers' point of view.

Now I threaded my way among the crowd to the further exit. In passing through the arched passage beyond I glanced aside into a lower, darker interior, where cooking was in process, and the white-robed figures of the cooks were gazing through the iron bars of an embrasure into the court. We traversed an open passage-way and then mounted an outside staircase emerging on a walled terrace, upon which opened several rooms. The sun in all its fervour of noontide poured on our heads from the scintillating blue. The plunge into a shaded room was refreshing though space was limited. A long sofa ran down one wall. Before it was a round table with chairs drawn up to it as closely as possible after a great deal of shifting and crushing of one guest and the other. A small barred window looked out upon the terrace, another on the opposite side of the room had a perforated shutter.

At last we were seated. Later on the majority of the guests would sit on the floor to partake of the meal, but the distinguished visitors, as also the Europeans, were to sit on the chairs. The table was covered with the food provided, and spoons and forks were handed to every guest. Those were conveniently wiped when finished with and passed on to the next comer. In the centre of the table was the dish of honour, round and large enough to hold a lamb roasted whole, and served with

its head between the legs. It was stuffed with rice and pine seeds, and so tenderly cooked that the insertion of a fork in any part of it separated, and then secured a succulent morsel. Small round dishes filled with varied preparations of vegetable and meat surrounded the central dish.

"Faddal!" cordially entreated our hospitable entertainers; and I boldly stuck my fork into the nearest dish containing sliced tomatoes and cucumbers. Egg-plants stuffed with rice and stewed in gravy proved a tasty dish. There was also the usual Arab dish of small gherkins stuffed with rice; various concoctions of rolled meat, minced meat, and the same oily gravy floating round all. Here and there stood a bowl of leban.[1] Into the one facing me I plunged my spoon, tasted, and dipped again. It was most refreshing to the parched tongue.

The water-jar was in great requisition. Glasses were handed like loving-cups from one to the other, and so athirst was my palate that no idea of squeamishness once entered my head. As attention slackened in the direction of the noble centre-dish, those in watching upon our needs brought in a massive brass tray, four feet in diameter, and placed it upon a stand, two feet high, behind us in front of the door. The first course completed, we were invited to turn our chairs round, when, before our eyes, was displayed the course of sweetmeats served on the brass tray. There was a large dish of meat pasties, and another of sweet pastry in the

[1] A preparation of sour milk similar to curds and whey.

shape of diamonds lined with citron and sugar paste. A shallow metal dish contained a pale unset jelly, filled with chopped and split nuts of every kind. It was wheat jelly, very palatable, but a lengthy dish to prepare, as the wheat took many hours' boiling to reduce to the jelly confronting us. It was delicious, as was also the sweet pastry. Another draught of water, and then we filed out of the little dining chamber to make place for the unfed.

Just without the door we were arrested for the washing of hands. A brass ewer with a false bottom received the soiled water as a servant poured fresh water from a long spouted copper vessel over our soapy hands. A second nut-brown woman waited near with the gold-fringed towel, and then we were invited to step into the upper chamber to rest before returning to the court.

The colonel's wife, accompanied by the wife of the chief officer of the police force, had preceded us, and were already seated on a couch at the end of the little bedroom. We were in the guest-chamber of the house, used also as bridal chamber when there was a marriage in the family, and now prepared for the use of the boy who was to undergo the rite of circumcision at the end of the feast. It is only in a few Mohammedan houses that the use of the iron bedstead has crept in. Here there were two of them, one on either side of the room, prepared in orthodox style, the mosquito curtains pinned up with large bunches of artificial flowers. The coverlets were of Tyrian blue silk, richly embroidered

JERUSALEM—SUNSET.

with gold ; and a large case to match lay on each bed, containing the ceremonious garments of the boy.

Now our hostess, smiling but pale, entered with a tray of tiny cups of bitter coffee. She was followed by a daughter with a tray of cigarettes arranged round a charcoal brazier from which each of the Turkish ladies set light to her cigarette. Cigarette-smoking had been incessant in the court except during dinner. It was pleasant to sit in comparative cool and quiet after the motion and din of the crowded area below. At the lower end of the room figures flitted in and out like chattering paraquets.

Coffee sweet and fragrant soon followed the bitter draught, and then came word that dancing was about to begin in the court below. We hastened away, not without a glimpse here and there *en passant* through the honeycombed parapets, across the roofs of other houses, over the green stretches, marble courts, stately pillars, and dark green cypresses of the Temple area, and beyond all to the sun-laved slopes of the Mount of Olives.

At every corner of the steps, beneath every doorway, at each window as we moved slowly downwards, were grouped picturesque figures that made one yearn for the use of an invisible camera to perpetuate the artistic attitudes and effect. It was always the native costume that produced these bewildering picture-effects, as wherever European influence of dress had obtruded the harmonies of colour and line clashed.

The two Beyrout dancers had vanished when we

returned to the court, but attention was at once absorbed in the behaviour of one of the small boys. He flew into a violent rage because he was prevented from sitting in the space cleared for the dancing, and his wrathful indignation was vented on a little girl who presumed to occupy a seat he desired for himself. Screaming, he darted at her, dug his fingers into her hair, and shook her, kicking at her with his feet and legs like one possessed. One of two older girls seized hold of him, expostulating, but he broke from them repeating his angry attack again and again. The little victim, for her part, uttered not a sound, only shrank back and cowered to the ground with a stubborn, set face. When the demon of anger was exorcised and the boy subsided into a special seat provided to assuage his offended dignity, she drew back, shook her long hair, and looked round as if nothing had happened.

"The children are not controlled in the least," said my neighbour. "The boys, especially, are allowed all their own way. The sisters have to yield in every particular. Their mothers say, 'It does not matter, he will make it up to you when he is grown up.' Strange to say, these same brothers when grown to be men make excellent brothers, and are generous to their sisters to a fault."

A gypsy-looking woman in a blue silk dress, her hair braided in two thick plaits hanging far below her waist, had made herself conspicuous in noisy appreciation of the singing, and frequent participation therein, also in a flow of facetious chatter to one and the other. She

was the wife of a non-commissioned officer and appeared to act in capacity of joke-maker and buffoon. She was certainly one of the chief elements in promoting festivity and merriment, and in the absence of the dancers she constituted herself mistress of the ceremonies, mounted the daïs and thrummed the tambourine with skill and energy. Two women, servants-in-waiting, suddenly began a weird tattoo on the kettledrum to the rhythm of a favourite hymn to the Prophet.

Suddenly, between us and the door, a figure that had been lying on the floor, her head on a mattress, eyes closed, mouth open, indicating exhausted slumber, sat up with a start, looked around with bewildered listening mien, then began hastily to bend her head and body from the waist right and left with violent jerking motion.

Right, left! Right, left!

The performer of this violent muscular exercise was none other than our old friend the beggar-woman. Every one gazed at her, some smiling and laughing loudly, others looking grave, while a whisper circulated, "Who is it?"

She was a sheikhi, I was told, or a woman dervish, though some of the guests considered she was a fraud, not a real sheikhi.

"Sometimes they keep on until they become unconscious," I was informed. This result was an undesired item in the programme of the entertainment. Uneasiness crept into the faces of the onlookers.

Right, left! Right, left! The scanty grey plaits

flew into the air, the poor old creature grew crimson in the face. Right, left! Right, left! The bowing and bending were as regular in action as if springs in the waist were working with automatic precision.

All at once to the rescue stepped down Madam the Jester from the daïs. She crossed the floor and squatted on the ground by the old woman's side. With strong, forcible pressure she placed her hand on the swaying head, and after a few spasmodic jerks, slackening by slow degrees, the old beggar opened her tightly closed eyes and leaned back against the seat of a wooden settle behind her. She was given a draught of water and then remained quiet and normal for the remainder of the time.

The dancers returned. The red plush gown was still in evidence. The head dancer had changed to a dressy white silk blouse, profusely decorated with real gold fringe, and a shimmering pale pink skirt. From her neck was suspended a massive necklet of large gold coins—five-napoleon pieces—hanging far below her waist. She was attaching it on either side to her belt as she tripped self-consciously into the open space.

"Do you see the skirt?" said a voice in my ear. "It is interwoven with real silver threads. 'She shall be brought to the king in raiment of wrought gold.' Gold thread is used as often as silver thread in the weaving of these costly materials."

The dancing soon became wearisome, the crude music and nasal singing monotonous. The novelty consisted in the effect produced upon the spectators, their avid

enjoyment and rapt observation of every movement and gesture. Suddenly the dancer glided on the tips of her toes to a corner of the room where a hand outstretched to her. The next moment she turned with smiling lips but motionless eyebrows, for above them shone the gold of a bright napoleon. Other money gifts came from outstretched hands on all sides, until I could count ten gold pieces stuck in turn on her forehead as she slid cautiously and graciously on tiptoe from one divan to the other. Mejîdis she received with the same languishing smile of gratitude, but these she slipped promptly behind her neck-band, whence they dropped to the pouch of her blouse.

Now a tiny mite of a child toddled up to her with small fist tightly clenched. She opened her palm disclosing a precious five-centime piece. The dancer smiled, took the coin, and stooped to kiss the child, then passed the coin to her own little girl, who was watching the dance and whole performance with magnetised gaze.

A sword was brought forward which the dancer took from the scabbard with a flourish as she started to sing a song about her lover who was a soldier. She brandished the weapon in rhythmic action with the music, and demonstrated by gesture after what manner her sweetheart walked, rode, and shot birds. Delight and cries of appreciation awaited each new sally.

Now the lady in plush descended from the daïs while the first dancer took her place, resuming the playing of the lyre. The new dancer gave a dignified and very graceful performance of an Arab dance. She

came in for a small harvest of gold coins and silver, but evidently she was not such a favourite with the audience ; her manner was cold and stiff in comparison.

It was now time to take leave, but the daughter of the house assured us that an interesting time was approaching. The boy was to be dressed in his new garments, brought into the court, and then all the women of the family would dance in turn before him. We waited, and watched meantime an interesting episode.

The beautiful bride, spoken of before, was in society for the first time since her marriage. She was to be decked out, made as gay as possible, and then placed in a central position ; and the singers would do her honour with song and music. Away they carried her, but she speedily reappeared in the midst of a laughing crowd of maidens and young wives, all excited and merry at their own pleasantry.

She sat in the special chair with composed mien and downcast eyes, as she had sat on her wedding-day. Sparkling jewellery of precious stones, glittering and darting iridescent fire, was massed like a helmet upon her dark hair. Tiaras, sprays, brooches, necklets of the whole company had been used to deck her out for the occasion. Behind her stood the singers, who sang in loud voices, the women around bursting at intervals into excited joy-cries.

Again we waited for the appearance of the boy, but as the hour was late, and we had already been present since eleven in the morning, I withdrew from the festive scene, which would continue until midnight, the relatives

remaining all night. Festivities would be resumed next day until the hour of the actual ceremony of the circumcision. Then the women dancers would display their skill before the host and his men guests : greater still would be the harvest of napoleons.

We received a hearty invitation to spend the night in the house, but this was impossible. In fact our hats had been hidden in the hope that difficulty in finding them would retard our departure. Reluctantly we withdrew after cordial adieux. The negress servants at the door thrust out their black hands to be shaken. " Ma'as salâmeh ! " sounded right and left. The men were still seated on the piazza at the other end of the house. The host hastened to accompany us into the street expressing regrets at our early departure.

It was too late for a carriage, so we hurried on foot through the narrow streets, emerging upon the open road outside the walls of the city through the Damascus Gate, and passing crowds of men before the coffee-houses, chatting and smoking on their low stools after the heat of the day.

CHAPTER XXXI

BY THE WAY OF THE WILDERNESS TO THE JORDAN VALLEY

ON the last day of December we came away from Jerusalem, where the nights were cold, though by day the sun shone brightly and radiated the heat of spring. It was difficult to realise as we drove down the valley of the Kedron, crossed the bridge, and wound up the rough road skirting the low slopes of Olivet, that a drive of three and a half hours would bring us to Jericho, where we anticipated to find weather equal to none in the world at that season of the year.

The hill was rounded by many a curve until Bethany came into sight, the solid, cube-shaped houses terraced on the slopes to our left, with many olive-trees as a background, and flanking the solitary little hamlet. Dominating the massed pinkish-hued roofs was the fragment of a ruined building showing massive, ancient masonry. This was pointed out as the house of Simon the Leper, though it seemed to me like the remnant of one of the numerous watch-towers of olden days. There were no palm-trees to be seen such as once there must have flourished, to have given Bethany the name of "House of Dates."

The descent began at once by a winding road which

THE WILDERNESS OF JUDÆA.

dipped, and curved, and skirted the hills, unfolding at every turn wider views of the wilderness of Judæa, until we reached, in half an hour's time, the spring known as the Apostle's Fountain. The spot was marked by an ugly, native khan of modern build ; the space in front was crowded with laden camels and the Bedawin in charge. And then we passed up, and down, and round a succession of bare, stone-strewn hills, where the only vegetation visible consisted of scanty tufts of coarse grass between the grey rocks, and a curious succulent plant that seemed to thrive in the dry wastes. All the time the descent continued, interspersed with occasional level stretches of short length. Jerusalem was 2,490 feet above sea-level, and Jericho lay no less than 825 feet below it.

At the loneliest part of the route, two-thirds of the whole distance, we passed the khan known by the name of the Inn of the Good Samaritan. Here the horses rested, but soon we were on the way again, passing the same bare slopes, limestone crags, and deep wild ravines, until suddenly the full view of the Jericho plain burst upon us as the road began to drop precipitously towards the wide, deep valley of the Jordan. Owing to the high wind that had prevailed for some days the unbroken range of the Moab Hills, which rose on the opposite side of the valley, was obscured, also the Dead Sea. Fine sand still filled the limits of the horizon with lurid hue, but the plain immediately below looked beautiful ; green, pearly grey, and lavender, level stretches all blending one into the other.

We passed the site of the Jericho of the New Testament, marked by the remains of a pool once connected with Herod's Palace. After skirting an ancient aqueduct, with many fine arches, we crossed the Wadi Kelt, and came close upon the village. Already I had noticed the thorn-trees of the plain, known under the name of *Spina Christi*, and now we entered the little oasis of modern Jericho with its scattered modern buildings embedded in gardens where orange-trees, date-palms, and other fruit-trees flourish, and sweet flowering shrubs of exotic growth.

In the Jordan Hotel we found most comfortable and homelike quarters, and chose a room, by preference, on the top story on account of the free current of air. An outside staircase mounted from the court to the long, covered balcony. One of our windows looked towards the Jordan and the Dead Sea. Immediately below was a large open space with the village shop exactly opposite. Behind it stretched the tiny village of Erîha (as modern Jericho is named), a collection of huts, with mud roofs, encircled by a thick zareba of piled-up thorn branches. Through the windows and door on the other side of the room we looked out, over the trees of the garden below, upon Quarantana, the Mountain of Temptation, with its monastery faintly indicated on the sheer wall of its high cliffs.

Later we strolled in the direction of Elisha's Fountain, known to pilgrims as the source into which he cast the salt of healing. The road, starting from the open space that fronted the hotel, led towards the

Judæan hills between hedges of thorn-bushes. Right and left in great sweeping curves stretched the giant fronds of the banana-trees; here and there, silhouetted against the sky, rose a graceful palm, or tall, slim poplars. Everywhere glowed the roses of thickly leaved oleanders.

Farther on we turned off the carriage road, and followed the banks of a lively stream which came straight from the imposing mountain background. Dwarf thorn-bushes dotted the green sprouting soil, tangled brambles, heavy with red, unripe fruit, stretched spiky arms from shrub to shrub. Close to the path I saw growing for the first time the flower and fruit called the Apple of Sodom. The bush had the appearance of a dwarf crab-apple tree with crooked boughs, the stems grotesquely gnarled and intertwined. Here and there in the sage-green, rough foliage rose a pale, purple-pink blossom, star-shaped, with a golden centre; it was not unlike the graceful potato-flower. The golden fruit I saw at another time.

Ten minutes' walk up the margin of the stream brought us to the fountain, where the hand of modern improvement had depleted its surroundings of natural sylvan interest. An artificial walled pool enclosed the fissure of the rock from which the source issued. A slight bubbling of the water on the surface of the pool was all that indicated the exact outlet. To one side stood a small native café, with many rush-bottomed low stools grouped near the edge of the pool. The water was allowed to escape through a conduit out of which

there leaped a sparkling cascade into the channel of the brook up which we had traced our way.

The view from the bank above the spring was extensive. North-east beyond Jordan the mountains of Gilead showed clearly, merging southwards into the range of the Moab Hills. The chiselled indentations of the lofty slopes, the blue distance, the moving cloud-shadows, the tender cloudlets floating gently northwards above the gracious summits, were all most beautiful to look upon. Far away between the green and grey of the plain and the base of the hills of Moab there intervened a narrow, shining surface which, mirror-like, reflected the face of the sky. It was the inscrutable water of the "Sea of Death," beautiful and calm as the evening sky itself.

We wandered down the meandering bank of the stream, our eyes fixed on an Arab encampment, which, with its dark brown tents, formed the darkest spot of the extending landscape. The tall, rounded olive-trees of an orchard close at hand, compared with the miniature proportions of phantom-like poplars standing out against the background, marked the extensive breadth of the plain.

Close to the roadway we turned aside to enter a garden which we had been invited to visit. The orange-trees were all stripped of their fruit save for a solitary golden globe on here a branch and there a branch. The shining foliage was green and thick. Close by stood a tree in blossom, the clusters half open, the waxen petals still closely curled. Their sweet aroma made

fragrant the soft freshness of the evening air. Spreading vine-tendrils covered intervening spaces between tall columns and formed a large trellised canopy. The shadows beneath that leafy ceiling were deep and cool. Everywhere over the fertile mould pumpkin foliage was running unrestrained in wild confusion. Surely the gourd of Jonah must have been of the same liberal and ready growth. A giant specimen of the gaudy fruit lay half concealed under the big leaves.

A bird with brilliant blue-and-green sheeny plumage flew from a leafy lemon-tree, and darted from bough to bough uttering a strange unmusical note. There were many varieties of nightingales in the Jericho Gardens. The residents call them all by the same name of bulbul. The most familiar was a bird about the size of a swallow, with black head and tail; the back and the surface of the wings were more brown than black, the breast was dove colour, merging into gold. The note of its song was sweet and pathetic, though neither sustained nor long.

Near the entrance of the garden was a mud-brick hovel where the guardian of the orange-trees, the figs, the vines, the pomegranates, and other fruits and vegetables, slept and lived. Before the door lay a prostrate tree-trunk with pieces of the half-shattered frame strewn in the dust.

We met two travelling Bedawin, a man and his wife, on the way back to the village. The Bedawi walked ahead of the woman leading his horse, which was loaded with saddlebags and nondescript burdens of clothing

and tent effects. His black keffiyeh drooped over his face, while over his shoulders hung the brown-and-black abbai, dipping to the ground on one side, while dangling high in air over the other arm. He scowled in passing. It was a swarthy, shining face, scorched by the desert sun, a rugged face lacking the classic delicacy of the pure Arab type.

The woman was dressed in the long Jericho or Bedawin dress of dark blue, with the sleeves forming a covering for her head. Her hair was of a rich, dusky brown, crinkled in small waves, parted and bushy at the temples, then hanging in two thick long plaits over her bosom. She had grey-blue eyes with dark lashes, the kohl-stained lids and sockets elongating and enlarging the form of the eyes. Her nose was small, and though wide at the nostrils, the bridge ran down the centre of her face into a delicate point. The upper lip was short, the lower pouted, while the blue tattoo marks round the mouth emphasised the inviting contour of lips and chin.

She was a beauty, in fact, tall, with statuesque bearing, sloping shoulders, and a high, swelling bust, over which the long drapery of her robe hung in classic folds. But round her bare feet the garment was bedraggled and torn ; the long train proudly sweeping the dust behind the Bedawin belle was stained beyond recognition of its original colour.

We turned to look after these two descendants of the original dwellers in tents, and then glanced upwards to the summit of the imposing background of hills.

Thorn Trees (*Spina Christi*) of the Jericho Plain.

The sun had set, but the sky was brilliantly clear, and palpitating with delicate, iris-hued ether, now breathing forth every tint of pink, now gold, now ruby, ever changing and living, vivid and glittering. We were in a land of summer skies, of balmy breeze. We had forgotten the cold winds of the hills lying round about Jerusalem.

The plain, stretching in broken lines to the valley of the Jordan, with its mounds and terraces of grotesque shape, was dotted with thorn-trees. Here and there came deep depressions, which were continuations of the wadis seaming the mountain-sides. In winter they formed channels for the headlong water-courses, though all of them were dry at the time we first rode down to the Jordan.

As we approached the river the landscape became fertile and pleasing. Deep thickets of tamarisk-trees, willows, and poplars, short underwood, and tall reeds with feathery plumes bordered the bank. Their foliage was brilliant with the most vivid tints of autumn colouring I had ever seen at home or abroad. The rains of a few weeks back had caused tender grass to spring up vivid and fresh in many places, adding wonderful touches of life to the arid plain.

The spot we reached by the riverside was clean and sandy, open to the water-edge. It was the customary bathing-place of the pilgrims. We struck northwards through the jungle and walked by an intricate track for a quarter of an hour towards the point of view chosen by the artist for a sketch. It was over against an extended

chalky cliff, which rose sheer from the water, with autumn-tinted shrubs and reeds growing at the base and bending low over the river. Here the first beauty of the colour had passed, the vividness had died, leaving the faded, dull hue from which the heart of life had vanished. At intervals, however, a touch of the former glory lingered caressingly against the grey worn surface of the shadowed cliff.

The river was running silently to its quiet, lifeless haven, the Dead Sea. It was a grey-brown, quiet current, which reflected, notwithstanding the opaque nature of its surface, the cliff of the opposite shore. There was a rippling, sighing movement through the leaves, the air played like velvet on the cheek, the blue of the sky was soft and veiled. The bank upon which we rested sloped steeply to the water's edge, seamed with cracks from the effect of the hot sun burning upon the muddy surface left after recent flood.

An island lay over against the opposite bank to the left, with only a narrow channel separating it from the hidden shore. Although it seemed covered with tree and bush growth, there were signs of life. Thin blue smoke curled up through the branches of tall trees on which there still lingered a scanty covering of dry, dull leaves. A sound of voices penetrated the space dividing us from the island.

Later we returned to the bathing-place and had lunch in the shade of some tamarisk-trees. It was during the first week of a new year, and yet so cordial was the warmth of sunshine that we needed to seek shelter at

times from the genial rays. Our mukari was a Bedawin youth of about twenty, so dark as to be quite bronze in colour ; he had flashing eyes with gleams of light in them, and teeth like ivory. His deep crimson-and-gold head-shawl enhanced the savagery of his whole appearance. His kaftan, long and straight to the ankles, was narrowly striped in blue and white. Slung carelessly over his shoulders and almost touching the ground he wore a black abbai, torn and ancient, as though it were a regal mantle. Whenever I alighted from my donkey he took off his abbai and spread it on the ground for me to sit upon, with a veritable Sir Walter Raleigh chivalry which was not natural to all donkey-boys.

He walked like some young prince of the desert ; his feet were bare and broad, ingrained with dust and mud. Had I met him during the first week of my journeys in the Holy Land, his appearance would have scared me, but custom soon proved the harmlessness and simplicity of these veritable children of nature. This youth came from a village in the Moab Hills, and had already been married twice. We discovered later that one wife had run away from him, and that he had deserted the second.

The Bedawin of the Jericho plains were very slack in their marriage customs, in contradistinction to many other parts of the country. It was nothing for a man to get married, then shortly go across the Jordan, remain among the hills for a few months, and return to his first home with a new wife. The first wife was then at liberty to marry again, or to do whatever she liked.

That same day we rode as far south as the Dead Sea, following the course of the Jordan about a mile from the bank on account of the marshy nature of the soil. As the river approaches the sea in which its waters are lost, the current becomes slower though deeper, and spreads into a wider channel. The northern end of the lake is exceedingly deep, varying from two hundred and fifty feet to about thirteen hundred. The route was dreary, winding between mounds and across gullies, then emerging on the flat, treeless waste which was frosted everywhere with salt crystals glittering in the sun.

At last we reached the sloping beach, which for so long a time had looked so near, yet seemed to defy approach. Looking south, mountains rose east and west of the lake shores, seeming in some places to rise sheer from the water, in others to retreat in yawning ravines. The surface was placid, almost oily in appearance, with a slight rippling movement from the south that created little waves splashing foam over the stones. Small pieces of black bituminous rock were intermingled with the pebbles. The taste of the water was intolerably salt, and permeated with a bitterness that lasted.

A wooden shed stood on the beach with an Arab in charge, for boats often pass to and from the opposite shore, though at irregular intervals. Quantities of drift-wood were collected on the shore, carried down by the Jordan at flood-time, and then readily cast up by the sea owing to the buoyancy of its waters. Black tracks of fire near the water edge were evident in many places. A mile or two away I saw a big encampment of the

familiar black-and-brown tents of the nomadic dwellers of the plain.

One of the perennial big parties of tourists came down in a long string of carriages as we happened to be sitting near the shore. I was dreaming of the days when great cities of the Romans were hidden between the openings of the mountains across the water, of the time when the mineral baths of Callirhœ were in great repute in the shaded recess of the hill wall lying in view somewhat to the south, where Herod the Great retired during his last illness. The flora in that wonderful valley is said to be of the exotic growth of Africa and Southern Arabia.

Then occurred one of those regrettable incidents with which thoughtless travellers carelessly strew their way through foreign countries, leaving wrong and, as in a case of the kind I saw, distinctly harmful impressions behind them. To test the buoyancy of the waters the men of this English caravan of tourists prepared to bathe in the sea, and walked westward with that intent. To the east one lady of the same party walked a little distance away. On the flat, open beach she calmly discarded all her clothing, stood for a moment silhouetted like statuary against the background of the vanishing plain, literally jumped first with one foot then the other into a tightly fitting pink garment, and walked into the sea. She advanced about a yard from the shore, and then began to swim in a course parallel with it in our direction.

"Lady not good, lady not pretty," exclaimed our

donkey-boy in Arabic—meaning that the lady lacked pretty manners—turning to me with horrified face, and speaking in distressed tones.

"No! Lady not good, not pretty, very ugly," I responded heartily, quite sorry for the moment that I hailed from the same country as the indiscreet female in the water. Needless to say the dragomen and native drivers of the party betrayed equal amazement and disgust. This was not the only exhibition of the kind we witnessed on the shores of the Dead Sea at various intervals. In the land of the harem and veil such behaviour is not only an indication of blatant bad taste, but of immodesty.

There was a curious bridge over the Jordan two or three miles to the north of the fords, used chiefly in winter after the heavy rains have made the river impassable in any other way. The distance from Jericho by carriage was no farther than to the pilgrims' bathing-place as the track branched off in a north-easterly direction. The shore curved inland opposite the bridge with an amphitheatre of low, conical-shaped earth-hills at the back. Upon the flat open surface, often over-flooded by the river, were two white tents enclosed with a bamboo zareba resembling that of an Indian village.

These tents were the dwellings of the toll-collectors of the bridge, who paid the Turkish Government a thousand pounds annually for the privilege of taxing every man and beast that crossed the bridge. The toll for a camel is equivalent to sixpence, for a donkey about

half that amount. A man may cross for a penny. The three brothers who farmed this lucrative source of revenue for the Government were able to net about three hundred pounds a year, more or less, according to the annual traffic.

During the whole time we were there, camel-bells sounded near and from afar. Bedawin, alone and with donkeys, were constantly crossing the bridge. The structure was built in trellisade fashion entirely of wood; it was tunnelled and had a roof. Huge beams and piles supported the bridge at either end, and also in the centre over a narrow, half-submerged island, thickly wooded with short poplar willows and tamarisk-trees.

North and south spread the jungle on both banks. The bushes and trees were filmy with the remnant of last season's foliage, while young leaves were already sprouting on individual boughs. The current of water was powerful, eddying in small whirlpools, and bearing swiftly downwards broken branches, and black fragments of decayed wood which looked like crocodiles. The bends in the river-course were frequent, and there were quiet backwaters in the miniature bays. Just above the foliage showed the blue summits of the hills of Moab.

The entire vicinity was savage and tropical to look upon. In flood time the whole of that receding mud terrace behind us would be hidden under the spreading river, for the water ascends rapidly in height. The river was full and swift, and rising even while we watched it.

Rain in the hilly country of the north had considerably swelled the current.

We crossed the bridge. The padlock of the lattice gate was unlocked, we paid the toll, walked over, and down the wooden descent on the opposite side, planting firm footsteps on the ground to be satisfied that we had really crossed to the further side of Jordan. While on the bridge, one of the keepers of the gate came flying over, gun in hand. He shouted out that he had seen a wild boar moving in the thicket. In a short time we heard the report of the gun, but he returned with crestfallen face, saying that the boar had escaped to an eminence surrounded by impassable mud, and he could not get near enough to continue his sport.

Tales of would-be and actual Nimrods are as rife round Jericho as fish stories in America, and snake stories in India. Here is one almost verbatim as it was told to me. A young American visited Jericho and professed great interest in hunting. He did not omit to allude to his personal skill and good fortune as a sportsman.

"I have hunted and killed every animal under the sun except a wild goat," he said. "I *must* kill a wild goat. You must make arrangements for me with a skilful hunter and we will go out together."

A Bedawi skilled in the trail of quarry was called into requisition and instructed to take the visitor where he would be likely to find what he desired—namely, the wild mountain goat of Sinai (beden or wa'al) that

is sometimes to be seen in the gorges round the Dead Sea.

The hunter declined to take anything with him but his rifle, food, and a blanket. He started off with the Bedawi, and nothing was seen of either of them for three days, then the hunter returned wild with rage. He had shot nothing. The Bedawi was asked privately how many wild goats he had seen.

"Sixty at least," he replied. He was as angry as the hunter, for he said he could easily have shot three or four of them if the visitor had not forbidden him to do so. The Bedawi was struck with admiration, however, with the way in which the visitor had been able to rough it ; he had not believed it possible for a Franghi to roll himself in a blanket at night, as an Arab in his abbai, and sleep on the ground.

Soon after this occurrence there came along another passionate hunter, travelling in style with many attendants, a big camp, and everything conducive to the turning of the wilderness into a passable hotel.

He was told about the goat-hunt and was straightway bitten with desire to go and do likewise. His dragoman, camp servants, muleteers, grumbled privately at being obliged to turn from their direct route and strike south instead of north, for they, too, had to travel with the hunter many miles south to the mountain ravines of the Dead Sea.

The same Bedawi was found and instructed to take the new traveller to the places where he had seen the sixty goats. The Bedawi said this was his time of harvest,

and he could not leave it unreaped unless he was paid in proportion to the loss incurred. He raised his fee from a mejîdi (four shillings) to a napoleon for one day only. The whole party camped out for a couple of days and nights, but they never saw the faintest trace of any one of those sixty goats.

CHAPTER XXXII

QUARANTANA—THE MOUNTAIN OF TEMPTATION

THE chain of hills which overlooks the valley of the Jordan culminates behind the gardens and pastures of modern Jericho in three imposing peaks, of which Quarantana is the central and highest. Its summit is flattened, and a keen eye gazing upwards from the plain can discern the outline of masonry encircling the plateau like a crown.

Sheer and inaccessible appear the cliffs of the three hill-peaks, but a peculiar phenomenon presents itself on the precipitous front of the Mountain of Temptation. Half-way up the almost perpendicular rocky side, as if cut out of the beetling surface, is a long, narrow white structure, looking like a series of galleries with windows and outer balconies hanging over a yawning abyss, which is far deeper than the observer on the plain can discern, for between the foot-hills and the actual mountain-side dips a gorge of appalling depth. This extraordinary building is a Greek monastery, suspended like an eagle's nest between heaven and earth.

It was an early January day, balmy and clear as an ideal June day in England, when we set out from Jericho to ascend Quarantana. The road leading away

from the hamlet was hedged by tall bushes of the prickly thorn, overhung by leafy foliage of the oleander gay with rosy bloom. Tall poplars reared their slender stature veiled by the filmiest of autumnal garbs. Farther on, when the hedges dwindled and the gardens retreated, we left the road which had Elisha's Spring for goal, and struck into a rugged path leading by gradual deviations to the left through uncultivated land.

The scattered thorn-bushes were finely sprinkled with the fresh green of young shoots. Clumps of sparse grass and herbs were upspringing on every side. A *Spina Christi* tree rose close to the path, the delicate filaments of early foliage enveloping the branches and whole tree shape like a moss-woven web. The ground ascended, the scrubwood thinned. A stream with stepping-stones crossed the pathway. The path narrowed. It was difficult to elude the long spiked branches stretching detaining fingers from the bushes.

Now the high bank of the first foot-hill was attained, and, still climbing, the path led along its brink, the depth of the wadi below increasing with every upward step of the way. Its steep slopes were grooved with great furrows ploughed by torrential rains of winter. Emerald streaks of verdure straggled over the edge and slid down the hollowed crevices to the bed of the gorge. The tells marking the site of ancient Jericho were far below to the right. Ahead on a terrace of land at the base of Quarantana itself stretched an oasis of luxuriant verdure overlooked by a plainly built house of two stories.

We turned aside and knocked at the wall door,

The Village of Jericho.

which was strongly fashioned and secured from within. The keeper of the garden opened and invited us to enter. The sound of rushing waters came to our ears. We skirted the house and lo! a merry stream tumbling in foaming, turbulent speed down an inclined bed, hurrying to irrigate the plain. Under shelter of a green and gold canopy of vine foliage we sat down on rush-seated stools and watched the running waters with the thrill of ecstasy evoked by the prospect in a land of parched soil and exhausted springs. Orange-trees, olives, the waving arms of the banana showed on the other side of the sparkling runlet. On the brink clustered clumps of familiar fragrant wall-flower and forget-me-not.

From this sweet resting-place the path up the mountain-face grew steeper and steeper. The narrow white galleries seemed to have been perched by miraculous agency in an inaccessible position. Their aspect stirred up a vivid desire for close investigation, and though the means of access were invisible from afar and the broken cliff-side appeared a perilous ascent, upward and onward at any cost was the supreme impulse of the moment.

The winding zig-zag cleverly and laboriously hewn out of the rock surface mounted higher and higher. Dark mouths of caverns, and narrow fissures were scattered from the height to the base. Here we looked at a dim opening into a hermit's grotto above our heads. At a turn in the path we held breath to stare down at the first cliff from which we had climbed; now it had shrunk to a mere bank in comparison with the height attained.

With a white flashing and whirr of wings out darted a flock of pigeons from their hiding-place in the rocks. And now the track, though steeper, broadened as it approached the monastery. A low plain structure of two stories formed an entrance to the rows of cells built into the cliff-side on a level with the upper floor.

The massive portal stood hospitably open. The passage within mounted by shallow broad steps in a stone-paved way to a small square gallery, dimly lighted from behind by an open space, which revealed the clear blue sky for roof between the house-wall and the rugged face of the mountain.

Directly facing the entry was a low detached chamber with a door in the centre and windows closely curtained with white on either side. This was the guest-chamber. The reception-room for visitors was on the opposite side of the gallery. Plain divans lined two of the walls, while in the third were deeply recessed windows and a door opening upon one of the balconies. Oleograph portraits of the monarchs of Europe looked down upon us. One long table completed the furniture of the room.

A Greek priest, his mitred headgear thrust back from his forehead, his face flushed but otherwise serene, invited us to be seated. From the balcony, the orchards of Jericho appeared like small shrubs on an enamelled carpet of many-coloured greens. The descent to the Jordan, with its broken outlines, looked like a series of miniature chalk terraces grotesquely shaped. Stretching into the centre of the picture, and ending with the

fineness of a silver-tipped arrow, came the clear surface of the Dead Sea.

Two cliffs framed this view of the plain and hills like a monster portal of which the one to the right was considerably higher than the other ; it was a veritable giant, menacing and dark, its furrowed flank, inaccessible to all but the goats, clinging like flies to a perpendicular wall. Between it and the Hill of Quarantana lay the deep gorge Wadi Dênûn.

So must the vast smiling landscape have appeared to Moses when he gazed upon the plain from the height of the mystic hills in the pale veiled background beyond Jordan. Over Mount Nebo itself there hovered a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. Where was that hidden grave ? Did the cloud envelop its secret as the cloud concealed the mysteries of the Mercy Seat between the Cherubim of Gold ?

And then the gaze dropped. The abyss below became a thing of terror. The drop was so sudden, the height so appalling from the fragile balcony to the depths of the wadi bed. Of a sudden, swoop across the chasm darted a pigeon with a softly breathed, cooing note. I stretched out my head and saw a score or more of the pretty creatures fluttering round the pigeon-cotes on the platform below, preening their glistening plumage, and passing in and out of their nests.

Oh, for the wings of a dove ! For how many centuries must the words have found utterance from the lips of men, who had bent world-weary feet towards the weird seclusion of these precipitous cliffs. Their

eyes must have watched the wild pigeons fly to and from their holes in the rocks until, verily, their lots became blended into one and the same quietude.

The spell of wonder was broken by the return of the monk to the room bearing a tray which held a jar of quince preserve, glasses of water, and spoons in an empty dish. One delectable spoonful, a draught of the cool spring water, and the tray was presented to the next guest. At the end of our visit the hospitable monks regaled us with coffee and home-infused liqueur.

Then we were invited to pass out into the little gallery, retrace our steps to the spot where the guest-chamber retired under the overhanging rock, and walk straight down a narrow corridor which ran between the concaved rock of the mountain-side and the tiny cells of the monks. Pallid, restrained light guided our steps. Overhead, where irregularities of the bulging crags permitted, strips of blue sky were visible in unfathomable distance. Heaven seemed far away.

Suddenly the rock wall retreated far into the mountain, disclosing a deeply hollowed cavern with jagged, overhanging ceiling. To one side of the entrance stood a rude stove and some iron crocks with various cooking utensils strewn about. We had come to the kitchen and refectory of the monastery. One or two monks in gowns ancient and rusty, their long hair twisted in a negligent coil below their caps, hovered near the stove where a small pan of charcoal was heating water for the coffee to be presented later to their guests. On a

boulder near sat a Bedawi closely wrapped in his abbai, with keffiyeh binding head and throat, allowing only partial view of gleaming teeth and eyes set in a face burned bronze. Motionless as a statue he crouched, only his eyes moving as their gaze followed our transit past the gaping mouth of the monks' dining-place.

A second stretch of that natural corridor with the intermittent glints of blue and sunlight, and then came a door to confront us and signs of masonry in progress strewing the pathway. To the left was an unframed window leading to an unfinished wooden balcony which overlooked the deepest, steepest part of the Wadi Dênûn.

Within the door we paused, and well we might. Our feet were upon holy ground.

We had entered another grotto which had been enlarged, bevelled, and converted into a chapel, with belfry, pillars, windows, and strong stone walls built up sheer from the rock foundation, while on the other side were the receding natural walls of the sacred mountain.

A flight of steps led up to a smaller chapel standing aloft and beyond like an alcoved chamber.

Tread softly as in thought you slowly ascend these steps. You have entered the grotto which is said to be the one to which the Son of God withdrew, to spend the forty days of His fast when He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil.

Look through that window. It is new and modern, but the view without is the same as when His eyes

looked forth from the mouth of the mountain cave. What winter storms may not have swept down that wild abyss, what scorching suns blazed upon the age-furrowed crags! Hunger and thirst no longer assail the dwellers upon the Mountain of Quarantana, but in those distant days of undimmed memory, standing out through the perspective of centuries, their assault was so difficult to combat in that mountain fastness as to allow the approach of the Arch-Suggestor of evil to the fasting body of the Perfect Man.

"Command that these stones be made bread!"

Was ever tempter so elusively, yet mockingly persuasive? Stones were scattered everywhere, the only product of the wilderness. There were stones for His head, stones beneath His feet, stones above Him and around. Everywhere stones, nothing but stones. And the human flesh was perishing for lack of bread.

"Then the Devil taketh Him up into a high mountain."

On from the secluded, desolate grotto, out into the open, we pursued our way up the wildest, most precipitous of tracks. It was a path strewn with boulders and flints, steep, rugged, twisting by abrupt turns, which dropped sheer to the gorge. The head grew dizzy, one dared not pause. Up and up to the hill-summit, till at last the knees gave way, courage faltered and failed as the steep, flinty soil slid beneath the feet. A cry for help was wrung forth involuntarily.

And then all was forgotten at the first sudden glimpse of the picture which burst upon the sight.

North and west were rolling mountain-ranges. Far across the ridge rose the opposing heights of Ebal and Gerizim, the gates into Nablous. From the north swept down the fertile valley of the Jordan River which revealed itself with many a gleaming reach. Where the hills melted into the dim perspective of the north, through the hazy atmosphere glistened something of a steady whiteness capped by a pearly shadow that might be either a distant cloud or a mountain-peak. It was Mount Hermon showing its winter mantle of driven snow at a distance of two hundred miles.

We turned round and faced the ridges and peaks of the hills of the Judæan wilderness. Furrowed and rolling, grey and bare, like the petrified waves of a stormy sea they stretched far away till from the outermost point there rose a perpendicular line skyward. It was the Russian tower on the summit of Mount Olive, a holy landmark to devout pilgrims even from this, the summit of Quarantana.

So much of interest is to be seen to-day. As much could be seen on the Day of Temptation. How much more imagination can only faintly apprehend.

On the brown and golden plain below, with the spreading oases and ribbons of verdure in the track of the life-giving streams, lay Jericho, the queen of cities, just where the Brook Cherith debouches its changeful current into the open. A wonder of beauty with its wealth of palm-trees, leafy sycamores, palaces, Roman villas, and native houses and huts with their vine-covered arbours. Stretching far into the plain from the foot-

hills on the site of the Jericho of Hebraic ages were the gardens and orchards watered by springs of renown. Wherever the eye rested were tracks of waving corn, rich pasturage, herbage for the herds of the wealthy landowners of the plain.

Somewhat to the north between the foot-hills and the next range of hills localising the sources of the springs of Ain Duk and Nawimeh, the castle of Docus must have showed its massive walls and turrets framed in foliage of tropical growth.

Yonder where the hills of Moab and Gilead beyond Jordan bar the horizon with the mystery and glamour of their atmospheric beauty, beyond the winding wadis, and the dense forests of pine and oak and firs, were the great cities of Perea and those of the lands of Gilead and Moab—some on the wane, others rising to a brilliant acme of architectural beauty and commercial affluence under the Roman period. Here would have been presented a vision of cities which might well represent the whole power of the world from which Satan's thrall would be instantly uplifted did the Tempted but render the required homage.

But the scene has changed. It is not the beginning of the Christian age, but the twentieth century which has set its mark on the famous hill-summit of Quarantana. A stone wall enclosed the whole area. Chaos dwelt within the circle. Spade and pick had been hard at work preparing the ground for foundations of a church to be erected by the Greek catholic community on the traditional site of the Temptation.

Traces of an old Crusading stronghold had been unearthed. To one side of the deep trenches, ruts, and mounds overrun with weeds and turf, was a zinc shed, walled and roofed, open at one end to the air. It contained a meagre apse with painted crucifix in the centre, and on either side a wooden case fixed to the wall. With a little persuasion the doors of the cases were opened, disclosing to view ikons of crude paintings representing the whole story of the Temptation.

Over the cases, inside and out, over every wall of the apse and shed, were scribbled the names of countless pilgrims who had toiled to the spot and left the record of their visit. Outside the temporary chapel stood a high brass crucifix with bronze rays emanating from the upper arm. The halo of rays will not be completed until sufficient money for the purpose has been contributed by the faithful pilgrims.

Hurriedly I withdrew from the walled enclosure to the bare hillside where nature alone appealed to heart and sight. Every stone, every slope, every blade of grass and thorny shrub, the deep abyss, the goats browsing where no mere human foot could securely tread, the tawny butterfly fluttering across the track, each and all possessed some intimate and solemn interest that contributed to make indelible impression of the imposing weird seclusion in which tradition has enframed the Biblical narrative of the Temptation.

And then began the descent.

Already the golden dust of sunset was filling with mystic radiance the vistas of the plain. All the colours

of the New Jerusalem were aglow on the mountains of Moab. Quickly the shadows of the western hills stole forth like a mounting screen. Night was astir in the lonely depths of the chasms. Our footsteps grew fleet. God help all poor souls lost in the dark on Mount Quarantana !

CHAPTER XXXIII

JERICHO, AND THE GREAT HAPPINESS OF ITS SITUATION

IT was Josephus who wrote of the "great happiness of the situation of Jericho," after enumerating the fruitful products of the environment which made the whole district, at that period of the world's history, one of the most beautiful spots on earth.

Those past-masters of colonisation, the Romans, saw the possibilities accruing to this ancient site, over-arched by a tropical sky, and possessing a climate with which, says Josephus, none in the habitable world could well be compared. By careful irrigation through the medium of aqueducts—relics of them remain to this day—which conducted the waters of two splendid springs to the Great Plain, they imparted an unequalled fertility to the rich soil, and made the whole vicinity the most fruitful country in all Judæa.

To-day the little oasis of orchards, greenery, fertile stretches of wheat, and springs near the base of the mountains is very pleasant to look upon and wander through, but it is melancholy to reflect upon the apathy of a Government which permits a locality so favoured by nature to lie fallow, and to have for its chief inhabitants the degenerate villagers of the wretched little hamlet

of Erîha. Those excellent gardens thick set with trees, that Josephus tells us about, the many sorts of palm-trees, the cypress-trees, and above all the balsam-plants, the most precious of all the fruits of the place—all could be made to flourish again, so that even in these days it would not be a mistake to call Jericho "divine" as the same writer did when he knew it, and found it good, in the days of Roman jurisdiction.

Several ancient writers assert that the balsam gardens of Jericho were the most noted, if not the only ones, in the world, the balm yielded by them being of particularly costly and rare quality. The sprouts were cut with sharp stones, and "at the incisions they gathered the juice, which dropped down like tears."

It is strange to connect the name of Cleopatra, of "Great Egypt" herself, with the balsam gardens of the Plain of Jericho, but it was to her that Antony made a present of the revenues collected from the regions around this great frontier town of Judæa that was the winter residence of Herod the Great. During her visit to Syria, when she used her influence over Antony chiefly to procure gifts of valuable land and cities, she came down to Jericho, and farmed to Herod—the creator of the city's beauty and prosperity—those same rights of revenue, which would have been principally derived from the gardens that yielded the precious and scarce balsam drug.

The waters of the springs are still as bountiful and sweet as in the days when they promoted the ancient fertility. One of them—Elisha's Spring—was already

The Mountains of Judæa, near Jericho.

a familiar feature of the vicinity to us, but one day we rode to the source of the Ain Duk, about an hour's expedition farther to the north. Our route was the same as when we started to ascend Quarantana until we came to the Spring of Elisha, which has also the name of Sultan's Spring (Ain-es-Sultan).

The site of the walled Jericho of the Canaanites has been placed just here by various researchers. Above the artificial pool, to which I have already alluded, there were mounds which showed in their sides the impressions of the mud bricks such as were made in those distant days for building purposes. They crumbled now to the touch.

Relics of an ancient industry were found, at a little distance to the north-west, in the form of ruined sugar-mills, which had once been driven by water, conveyed along the base of Quarantana in conduits from the Ain Duk, to which we were bound. Long centuries before we used sugar, exported to England from her West Indian possessions, the sugar-cane flourished near Jericho. The débris of the three mills which now spread desolation in the hollows of the foot-hills were in active use up to the times of the Crusaders. The industry appears to be one of those that might easily be revived by an enterprising government.

The track was one continual climb and descent through glens and small passes of the knolls and terraces at the foot of the high mountain barrier. It was the same naked and barren mountain of great length hanging above the plain that Josephus mentions, "uninhabited

by reason of its barrenness." It seemed to defy access from this eastern side, though the heights were easy of approach from the west by means of highland tracks winding through the wilderness of Judæa.

As we passed below their towering cliffs they appeared to our uplifted gaze like giant walls of rock, engrained and mottled with brown and purple. Near the base, and at intervals over the whole surface of the precipitous slopes, were dark cavern-mouths, even near the summits of the cliffs where entrance would have been impossible except by a rope or hanging ladder. Remains of an old aqueduct ran close to the base of the mountain for some distance.

Thorn-bushes grew in profusion on the rolling ground at the foot of steep rocks and high banks. The path was constantly skirting deep troughs in the broken soil, where the dripping of water had eroded the earth into weird forms, resembling ruins of ancient buildings.

White flowers were shooting up from the motley variety of succulent herbage. Little deep-blue blossoms peeped like bright eyes out of the green. Pink campion and golden marigold seemed to seek the sunniest spots. The pseudo-apple of Sodom was growing everywhere, from the height of a tree to the size of a small shrub. The rounded fruit with its smooth, shell-like skin and brilliant amber colour, was hanging orange-like in the blue-green foliage. Yonder were castor-oil plants, big as trees, and wildly luxuriant.

Now we came to a healthy stream hurrying through a wadi to the plain, fringed with tall reeds. By-and-by

we skirted a bristling hedge of yellow cane-stems, almost black at the roots, which bordered another stream. We crossed this shortly and came to the edge of a deep ravine lined with masses of autumnal-tinted foliage intermingled with spring verdure.

Deeply ensconced between the steep cliff walls of the wadi were the graceful arches of an old Roman aqueduct in splendid preservation. It was a treble-rowed aqueduct, the small arches above supported by a small, and a very large arch beneath. Trees of wild growth grew out from the cliffs on either side of this beautiful, mellow-toned structure, their multi-hued foliage contrasting picturesquely with the ancient masonry. It was a wonderful relic dumbly reminiscent of Jericho's vanished magnificence, hidden away in this secluded gorge where none would have suspected its existence.

It disappeared from view as the path left the edge of the wadi, and inclined towards the hills, terminating at the head of the spring we were seeking. It was a wildly romantic spot. The source started from the ground, which was banked behind into a crumbling wall above the fountain-head. The water flowed forth in a full, gurgling stream, over a pebbly bed towards the wadi, disappearing through an impenetrable thorny thicket.

Above the head of the spring stretched out the long grey trunks of a group of ancient thorn-trees. Freshly green shoots were springing out of the great gnarled branches and hanging in graceful abundance over the water. It would have been a cool spot even in summer.

The sunshine filtered through the network of the sparsely leafed branches above in filmy golden haze.

While we sat there, a number of children belonging to some Bedawin tents in the background beneath the hill came to the spring. They had evidently come intent on business. A little maiden of twelve walked straight into the shallow stream with an empty water-skin which she proceeded to clean with vigour. She wore a cap fitting over her head edged by a fringe of coins. These dangled round a brilliant little face which had large, deep eyes, a small straight nose, and full, finely curved lips, slightly parted, revealing gleaming, faultless teeth. Her frock was of a marvellous colouring, striped red, blue, and green, all toned to harmony by the effects of sun and rain. A sleeveless jacket hung over her shoulders, while round her neck was a chain from which dangled a big coin. Bracelets of silver decorated arms and wrists. Her brown, slender legs and feet were in the water.

In strange contrast with this handsome, sturdy little maid, there stood, chattering to her, a pale delicate girl dressed in faded blue, and wearing a white veil bound round her head and neck with the ends slung over her shoulders. An older girl, probably of seventeen, came to the brook-side. Her blue robe was in good condition, as though the garb of one not long a bride ; the white veil worn over her coin-decked cap was tied up in a bunch at the back of her head. She too had bright dark eyes, full cheeks, and an engaging manner. While she began to wash in the stream, beating the clothes

with stones like French peasants, the children walked up and down through the water vastly enjoying themselves.

Then a Bedawin mother joined the group and stood tenderly caressing her baby, which wore on its wee brown head a red cap adorned with beads and many charms; the little coat was dingy and dirty yet gay with bands of bright red. Close by stood a youth with an open countenance, pointed features, and a very prominent nose. He was clean; and spotlessly white was his large turban. Like many another shepherd he was actively employed in weaving wool into yarn, bobbins and fingers ever in active movement.

It was refreshing to see the bright, healthy aspect of this party of Bedawin after being in daily touch for so long with the Jericho residents. To what tribe they belonged I do not know, but they had possibly removed to the plain from some other district, to take advantage, for their animals, of the spring verdure in the foot-hills.

Before descending to the glen with its hidden aqueduct, where the artist was already sketching, I wandered about, trying to find a possible site for the castle or ancient hold of Docus, which is supposed to have been situated close to Ain Duk. It was the hold where Simon Maccabæus was treacherously betrayed at a feast given in his honour by his son-in-law, Ptolemy, and then assassinated.

A flat elevation was close at hand, with many rocks and a quantity of débris half embedded in the soil. The situation was one which afforded wide outlook over the plain. It seemed to me, and the friend

accompanying me, that we had found the exact spot; but this is entirely a personal, not an authoritative, opinion.

Satisfied on this point we descended by a steep, difficult path through the thicket to the bed of the wadi. The tangled growth of brushwood and tall reeds at the base of the cliff hindered progress on the side by which we had approached. We had to cross the stream, therefore, on slippery, pointed stepping-stones, and then scramble to the height of the opposite cliff by a shaly track that mounted from one rocky ledge to another, and twisted round projecting crags of conglomerate with perverse intricacy. It was a case of the longest way round proving the shortest, for by no other means could we reach the aqueduct which showed its massive stonework above the foliage.

The happy stream splashed and danced through the gorge, while on the height above a large plot of cilla-plants were growing in healthy, succulent exuberance, spreading their tapering leaves over a sandy soil, as fresh a spot as if tended by a gardener. We picked our way through the plants and then dipped over the steep by a zigzag track winding down the formidable cliff to a fertile meadow where the wadi suddenly widened in face of the aqueduct, though a great barrier of bushes and reeds shut out the lower arches from view.

Men in native costume were driving oxen yoked to the plough through the rich red mould. A long strip of vivid green left in the centre of the ploughed land testified to the green wildness that must have spread through the glen only a few days before. Behind the

Roman Aqueduct, Ain Dûk, near Jericho.

aqueduct towered the background of mountains, iron-bound, immovable, yet showing colour of surpassing beauty.

With some difficulty we penetrated to the foot of the arches. It was wonderful to realise that this graceful relic of antiquity with its mossy, green-strewn walls had survived two thousand years of wear and tear. Suddenly the spring water still flowing through the conduit above the arches splashed upon us, quenching enthusiasm with a thoroughness that seemed the malevolent trick of one of the jinns supposed by natives to be in constant possession of such ancient structures. It was only the mischievous trick of some Bedawin women, however, who were filling their water-skins overhead, and by way of amusement, or the prompting of pique at the intrusion upon their domain, had thrown water upon us.

We smiled appreciation of the joke, and passed beneath the arches, crossing the stream several times in the transit. On the other side we again mounted the cliff to see the strong trough of the conduit which had resisted the attacks of time so vigorously as still to be able to carry water from the spring to fertilise portions of the Great Plain. The channel disappeared through an artificially made tunnel in the hillside.

About an hour's ride to the north of Ain Duk, through the same wild scenery and by tells of varied size, there is another stream, called the Aujeh, where fishermen can carry their rods and spend a pleasant day in sport of a mild nature. For judging from personal experience the fish of the Aujeh is wary, and when

caught at rare intervals after exercise of long-enduring patience, proves to be of modest size, to say the least.

The little river flowed out of the heart of a deep gorge which pierced the mountain-side, one slope of towering height rising behind the other. The mouth of the Wadi-el-Aujeh was wooded with small trees, the banks of the stream were high, and of rich soil extending down to the pebbled margin. Great bunches of tall reeds rose from the water, their graceful heads soaring like palms above the banks.

The stream was sprinkled with miniature islands, overgrown with reeds and undergrowth, which was leafless at the season when we went to the spot. The swift current had caught bundles of tangled driftwood and whirled them in masses against the boulders. Dead branches, flung from bank to bank, made a bridge in one place across which a herd of black goats came stepping nimbly, their colour making a strong, distinct note in the landscape.

Behind the river a spur of the mountain ran out in a descending ridge which curved southwards and merged into the plain. The ruins of a Roman city of some importance lie at the foot of the mountains by Wadi Fasael, to the north of the Wadi-el-Aujeh. This was the city built by Herod the Great, called Phasælus after his favourite brother; he presented it to his sister Salome. The palm-groves of the environment were celebrated like those of Jericho, and the surrounding country became more fruitful, says Josephus, by reason of the cultivation introduced by the Roman colonists.

These pleasant spots and many others all within easy distance of Jericho are unbroken ground to the majority of travellers who visit the valley of the Jordan. It was the rule for them, whether in large or small parties, to arrive at the hotel at the lunch hour, to start for the Jordan and the Dead Sea early in the afternoon, return in time for dinner, then go out with lanterns to visit one or other of the permanent clusters of Bedawin tents encamped in the vicinity. Early next morning, frequently at six o'clock, they were on the way back to Jerusalem. If they could squeeze in time for a flying visit to Elisha's Fountain before they arrived at the hotel, or after the return from the Dead Sea, this site came also into the Jericho itinerary. It always seemed such a pity that so little time was given to an expedition containing many salient features of intense interest, after the travellers had made the effort of travelling hundreds, and often thousands of miles to get there. The general impression left on the mind of many must surely have been one of utter weariness and emptiness.

A rainy day at Jericho was not an unpleasing experience, for the air was so mild the while the showers lasted, and the general aspect of the landscape so great a contrast to the customary sun-bathed perspectives of plain and mountains, that the variation created interest. Looking west from our room door on the top story of the hotel, the hill of Quarantana was clearer to view than on a cloudless day, every depression being deeply shadowed.

The entrance to the Wadi Kelt (Cherith), close to the

road ascending to Jerusalem, loomed heavy and menacing, disappearing in impenetrable blackness between the two cliffs of the gorge. When the eye travelled back from the hills to the garden below, the greenery struck a mellow, rich note of colour against the sombre background. Tawny and gold leaves stood conspicuous among the evergreen foliage of the orange and lemon trees. The boughs of the big plane-tree on a level with the top verandah rustled and swung to and fro as though in strong consciousness of power.

Drip, drip, fell the raindrops upon the blue-painted balustrade of the balcony. The soughing in the trees broke at intervals into a whistling wail. An old native woman walked by the garden wall and halted near the stack of withered branches cut down for fuel. She began hurriedly to snap off twigs and branches, collected them into a bundle, and then, with many a stolen glance towards the court, she crept back the way she had come, slipped into the road, and disappeared from view down a narrow lane.

Now a heavy shower began to fall, veiling the hills, blotting out all contrast of light and shade. Faster and faster fell the raindrops, until there seemed to be thousands of streams pouring direct from the heavy clouds upon the parched, thirsty land. How the reeds waved and lowered their feathery heads! The Dead Sea was a pallid line against the sad grey wall of the Moab Hills.

The downpour diminished and suddenly ceased. Through the cloudy zenith began to filter the pale light

Rain Effect over the Dead Sea and Jericho.

of the hidden sun. At last it shone free of the clouds. Over Quarantana, as I turned my glance westward, there extended to view a long stretch of vivid blue sky. It rained no more that day, and on the following morning summer again smiled on the land. So gently breathed the wind from the hills that the red flag with the white crescent and star dangled languidly against the pole erected over the village stores on the opposite side of the open space.

The low building with its yawning entrance had been washed to a clean grey by the rainstorm. A man in a ragged abbai was hacking at the carcase of a sheep that had been munching grass before its place of martyrdom a few hours ago. Three Bedawin stood before it in a row, intent on the process of dissection. Against the wall a shepherd youth leaned, with the languid nonchalance of a Turkish judge. An effendi, in Western garb, his fez thrust to the back of his head was gesticulating largely to a native who had just trotted up on a sturdy white mule.

A wailing, minor-pitched chorus of many voices became audible from the farther end of the village, and soon a procession of Bedawin came to view, emerging from the narrow lane that skirted the thorny zareba. The men were carrying a swathed figure on a roughly constructed bier covered with a red rug. A Bedawi who met the cortège stepped forward to take a share of the burden.

Three women followed the bier, the centre one supported by the other two, who were wailing loudly.

It was the mother who was helped forward, her whole countenance distorted with grief. Her only son, a lad of fifteen, was being carried to the grave.

The road leading from the square, in the direction of several gardened houses, skirted a small common dotted with thorn-bushes and rank herbage. It was a favourite camping-ground for travelling caravans, Bedawin corn-merchants, and so forth, and muleteers with their beasts were still clustered there in picturesque groups after their rest of the night before. Behind the prickly hedge to the left of the road was a Moslem cemetery with plain headstones and heaped mounds of stones spread broadcast over the uneven ground. Several thorn-trees rose at intervals between the graves.

At one end of this burial-ground the dark figures of the mourners collected in a group. The men busied themselves in digging the grave while the women guarded their dead, uttering the mourning cries of their race. A continuous stream of blue-robed figures passed between them and the grave. The hills in the background were pale and sunlit, a faint tinge of green spreading over the ribbed slopes.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE BROOK CHERITH AND THE MONASTERY OF ST. GEORGE

ON the way down to the plain of Jericho we caught a glimpse of the wild grandeur and immense depth of the Wadi Kelt, and were so struck with what we saw that we visited the gorge more than once during our long stay in that part of Judæa. The Wadi Kelt is a continuation of the fertile Wadi Fâra, and, after emerging from the mountain, runs through deep, jagged banks to the Jordan.

The stream, which rarely dries up entirely in the rocky bed, has been identified as the "Brook Cherith that is before Jordan," where Elijah the Tishbite, in obedience to the Voice Divine, lived in retreat during the severe drought which preceded his appearance on Mount Carmel. Here he drank water from the unfailing stream, and was fed by the ravens, which, according to certain authorities, were none other than members of the Raven tribe of Bedawin. His reputation as a great seer would have made him a personage to be sought out, apart from the circumstance that he was himself a Bedawi.

Two reasons were therefore cause sufficient that the Wadi Kelt should be visited: its connection with the

grand Old Testament Bedawi, and the natural wonder of the scenery.

We rode out from Jericho towards the hills and ascended the high-road to Jerusalem, until we reached the path that led down on the right to a precipitous valley of which we could only see the beginning, as the ravine between the hills wound to the left out of sight. Down, down, round and round again curved the track, the gorge becoming wilder and deeper at every turn. The cragsides were sheer and threatening and of an appalling height, showing clefts and caves in the rocky walls in every direction.

The stream of the Kelt, or Cherith, was strong, deep, and tortuous. Little terraces of green sloped almost perpendicularly between the stratified rocks. Far overhead, where the sky peeped above the lofty brink of the precipice, were grey bushes, brown soil, and a fringe of herbage. The soft blue of the distant sky seemed to whisper of peace even in that desolate gorge.

Then, with the sharp curve of one bend in the path, came the striking sight of a strangely built monastery perched high against the opposite cliff. A modern stone bridge with a large and a small arch spanned the gulf at a great height. It was arched with a vine-grown awning, which, though now a network of bare stems and sparse autumn foliage, would in summer form a tunnelled screen of green, shielding pedestrians from the burning sun.

Across the bridge the straight walls of this Greek monastery of St. George were built up from massive

rock foundations which date from the fifth century. The wooden balconies above overhung the abyss at a tremendous height. To the right of the building a small dome indicated the position of one of the churches. A steep and winding path led upwards from the bridge with a long gradient at the end, which curved sharply round to face the small walled court of entrance to the monastery. To the left dropped the sheer cliff; to the right rose a terraced roof.

A balcony projected above the narrow archway and its strong iron door. The cord suspended in air was a method of communication from within with belated or suspicious visitors. We entered through the opened door and the odour was that of a stable. It was like a plunge into the dark, so sudden was the transition from the sunshine to an interior that had no windows but lancet-slits in the outer wall built up from the solid cliff. Animals were moving about at the farther end.

An ancient stone staircase was within a few paces of the door, and we mounted into the centre of a large hall supported by pillars. Alcoves in it opened out upon three balconies. We looked out from one of them into the abyss, and up and down the gorge. The terraces and paths were toy-like in size and outline; figures were in miniature. Only the sound of the rushing waters borne upwards testified to the force of the current swirling between the rocky barriers of its deep bed. Boulders barred the stream, which divided with foaming rush to meet and boil beyond them in eddying whirlpools.

The cypress-trees of the monastery gardens reared themselves dark and distinct against the grey-brown cliffs. Below spread a small plantation of olive-trees and fig-trees.

A door on the opposite side of the hall led through a long, narrow room hung with ancient pictures into the churches. The first church we went into was built in a cavern of the cliff. On all the rock walls were frescoes of great antiquity, worn almost to illegibility. One figure of noble outline still remained, and its head had been repainted in a sympathetic, masterly style. Both the frescoes and mosaic pavement beneath were relics of the old Crusaders' church. They may even have dated from an earlier Christian age, but for this inference I have no outside authority.

In the smaller church the rock wall was visible, and it contained an inner cavern, or sanctuary, which the monk gave us to understand had ancient and mystic associations. Frescoes and mosaic were in this church too.

Both of these unique rock-shrines of worship contained many pictures of crude modern work, probably done by the monks. Two or three with Russian inscriptions were superior to the rest. There was more than one painting of Elijah, and a figure of St. George in complete armour and helmet. There was one curious, very old picture of the same patron saint and the dragon, a truly fearsome beast with crimson jaws and head, dragged in chains by his victor.

The most impressive picture must be mentioned separately. It was a strange, remarkable figure of Christ,

attired like a mendicant in a short garment extending only to the knees. The lower limbs were painfully attentuated, and His hands were stretched out, mutely demanding alms. The face enframed with ragged beard and hair was pointed and strained in expression.

From the churches the monks conducted us into the open, where above our heads we saw the jagged mouths of caverns in the face of the cliff. Rude ladders descended from several. I looked closely within one of the caves and saw a staircase roughly hewn out of the rock mounting the interior of the hillside. But it was to a cavern discovered only twenty years ago that we were being taken.

It had been the interesting find of an ancient catacomb, gruesome to look upon, for behind a low iron railing were stacked all round the rock walls skulls and bones of the hermits and monks who had died in this isolated retreat of the Wadi Kelt. Tapers were alight in every corner. It was a place of prayer, for the missal stood open on a small lectern, which had an antique capital for its base.

In the heart of this wild gorge the monks had planted a garden which made out of the desolation an oasis of verdure. We descended to the bridge and walked through the narrow, terraced orchard of fig-trees, lemon-trees, pomegranate shrubs, palms, and olives. A mill rose close to the bridge, and a water-tower, with a forcing pump to carry water up to the monastery on the opposite cliff.

The first time we had descended the path from the

high-road to the Wadi Kelt the bed of the brook had been perfectly dry. Now a torrent swept through that deep, narrow pass between the rocky, precipitous banks. Along the side of the cliff, at the back of the narrow garden, ran the straight trough of the aqueduct that came from far up the glen, where it crossed the turbulent torrent with pointed arch and picturesque swing.

We rode back to Jericho through the glen itself instead of mounting to the road. The pathway was narrow and winding, placed half-way between the summit of the cliff and the extreme base where the sturdy brook swept untiringly to the plain. I looked back to take a last view of that weird, extraordinary spot hidden away in the midst of the hills, but the irregularity of the cliffs had already hidden every trace of the monks' handiwork from sight. Savage bareness and ruggedness extended skyward on both sides. The depth below was immense, the height above even greater.

Large rocks projected everywhere like giant sounding-boards. At intervals there came tremendous stretches of sudden descent from the edge of the path. Solitary bushes were dotted between great boulders, and occasionally a strip of verdure dipped as far as the brook. The margin of the water was thick with reeds and vegetation which showed the youthful green of spring together with the autumn foliage still loth to quit the trees.

Hermits still lived in the caves of the cliff-sides. Far overhead, or close at hand, we would see rude masonry built into the crumbling rock to protect an entrance to a cavern, or hinder the subsidence of overhanging rocks.

THE HILLS OF JUDÆA FROM JERICHO---SUNSET.

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Constant downpour of water in the rainy seasons had created deep recesses in the cliffs round which the path crawled with painful, dangerous curves. Large masses of shale strewed our way and the declivities in those hollows where the eroded rock had crumbled and fallen.

The solitariness and the wildness of it all were overpowering. We crept along the face of the cliff, insignificant as midges on a wall. Just above our heads a large bush of white flowering broom suddenly came in sight ; the dainty, white-tipped branches seemed to wave courage into the faint hearts of the wanderers.

Then appeared close to the water-edge, which seemed farther than ever away, a tiny shanty of wood built into the rock with a small ladder mounting to the door. There were caves, too, near the brook with cranes constructed for hauling up water and food to the door. Farther on, other wooden shanties came into sight with ground cultivation on both sides of the brook. It was a remarkable thing to see that little fertilised plot deeply embedded between the narrow confines of those yawning crags.

The first peep of the plain came upon us slowly, and was again lost to view as the path curved inwards. Then I remembered that we were toiling through none other place than the Valley of Achor. The plain beyond, smiling and placid with one deep purple shadow flung across the lines of green and gold, was the veritable Promised Land.

No one who had just emerged from the wilderness

of that terrifying gorge could fail to grasp the inner meaning of that significant metaphor, "the Valley of Achor for a door of hope." The weariest traveller, the saddest pilgrim would feel his heart swell within him with hope, revived and stimulated, upon catching one glimpse of the peaceful beauty of that lovely prospect. The valley of troubling, of affliction, lay behind, and would straightway become valuable to his soul, for through that way alone had it been possible to attain unto rest and the fulness of that peace which is the last, and the highest hope of every human soul.

With every curve of the pathway the threatening attitude of the cliffs relaxed, their lofty height dwindled. The purple shadow across the plain was but the tranquil surface of the Dead Sea. Light and shade chased each other with bewildering effects on the Moab Hills. The path sank low as it freed itself from the ravine, and then crossed two stony beds of dried streams. We kept to the left of the Wadi Kelt, making direct over the plain for the distant houses of Jericho.

As we rode slowly homewards I pondered over the words of that ancient chronicler who, speaking of those dwellers in the holes of the rocks, the anchorites of old, extols them as: "Ces abeilles du Seigneur qui recueillent là les dons du ciel, et préparent le miel de l'éternité."

Though these words seem difficult to apply to hermits of to-day, yet the underlying sentiment may still be recognised in a measure. I was told of a monk who inhabited one of those solitary shanties, fronting a cave,

in the Wadi Kelt, and earned money—a very earthly honey—by carving wood into small crosses and emblems which pilgrims were eager to buy. The powers that reign over that community of monks pronounced verdict that he was gathering together more money than was essential for his own daily sustenance, and banished him to Mount Athos.

It would be interesting to know from what point of view chroniclers of to-day would regard the motives underlying this episode.

CHAPTER XXXV

EPIPHANY AT THE JORDAN—A MECCA OF THE RUSSIANS

AN angry, ever-changing sky with cold glimmers of blue. Clouds heavy, light, fleecy, or sombre, chasing and evading one another from side to side of the heavens. The hills, at one moment dark and prominent, were the next shrouded in sweeping rain, or effaced in heavy mist and flat tones of grey. Cold and monotonous the plain stretched forth in every direction. The mud roofs of the village of Jericho were dripping from the twigged eaves and bare overhanging branches, now the only remnants of summer awnings.

Splash through the soaking, sticky mud of the lane long strings of pilgrims wended their way to joyous purification in the sacred waters of the Jordan. Onward as far as the eye could see, beyond the native huts where the road divided into irregular tracks, the black figures were in evidence, hastening, plodding, bending under burdens that gave them the appearance of an army of Christians, stepped direct from Bunyan's allegory. And every one of them carried a thick high staff, made of bamboo, or of the reeds growing on the banks of the Jordan.

Overhead the sun made efforts to break through the misty awning into which the clouds had gradually collected. Suddenly from the south-west, over the cloud-enveloped hills of Judæa down to the plain, and tearing northward between the skirting hill-ranges, came fierce, shrieking spasms of wind. The Russian pilgrims dotted among the shrubs and thorn-trees of the plain bent sideways to resist the blasts of unpent fury. Their skirts and garments clung to their limbs with dragging hindrance, but still they toiled untiringly on. On the sodden ground the high wind of the previous night had wrought a marvellous transformation. Numberless footprints made by pilgrims ahead formed many an even track, hard and solid, for those who followed.

Now they passed near the ancient tree which marks the site of Gilgal of old. Soon came a sharp descent into the bed of the Wadi Kelt, a slippery, shelving bank, a stony watercourse, and a steep ascent on the opposite slimy acclivity. For a time the bushes gathered into thickets, thorns stretched detaining fingers towards the garments of the unwary. Again came a dip in the way down to a broad, flat stretch of clay soil over which every step had to be cautiously tested. Thousands of footprints revealed themselves ankle-deep in the worked-up, stodgy ground.

They were crossing the old channel of the Jordan River. Now it was a lengthy terrace bordered by curious-shaped mounds which glistened with crystallised salt atoms. It had the appearance of the dried bed of an inland sea where the waters had beaten and rubbed

the pliant soil into grotesque forms at will and then suddenly vanished, leaving its creations to harden into perpetuity in the sun. Beyond these the bushes again opened out to the right, and a curious hut came into view at the end of the cleared space near some overhanging trees. Straight in front spread the foliaged banks of the river. The muddy, irregular track widened in its approach to the bank, and was bordered right and left by thickets of tamarisks, willows, small shrubs, with here and there a few filmy poplars. Close to the bank was a newly erected booth, trellised, and looking like a huge cage composed of tree-stems.

At this spot there should have been an animated scene to meet the gaze of the newly arrived pilgrims, for it marked the ford, ordinarily the bathing-place of the pilgrims at the season of the Epiphany. But to-day no pilgrims were to be seen there. Owing to the inclement weather the ceremony of immersion was to take place at the ford called Makhâdet Hajleh higher up the river. A moment of incredulity, then yielding to the pantomimic gestures of some Bedawin stationed on the spot to put those who erred on the right track, they retraced their steps with stoical mien for a hundred yards and then turned northwards into a narrow road leading through the bushes. They crossed a shallow watercourse, and continued on the same track until it opened on a bare stretch of ground resembling the cut-up muddy surface of a cattle enclosure. At the far end of this open space the ground rose into bare banks and shelving terraces of irregular formation. On the highest of these stood

a plainly built edifice. This was the Monastery of St. John (Der Mar Yuhanna), built on the site of one more ancient which dated from the age of Justinian, and stood, according to tradition, over the grotto where John the Baptist dwelt.

Over this barren stretch untethered camels were roving at will. At the other end of this open space, which was but a terrace above the shore of the river, stood a few booths and tents tenanted by vendors of staves, food-stuffs, and drinks. Around them were clustered the pilgrims, and Arabs who acted as guides and muleteers.

The whole space to the river-bank was thronged with all conditions of men and beasts. Donkeys and mules by the score, carriages, both native and European, were drawn to one side, the horses unharnessed and tied to the wheels or shafts. Arab steeds, freight camels, and donkeys were feeding, neighing, groaning, braying, plunging, dozing, or rubbing one another's necks. Beyond these were displayed all the signs of a vast fair in progress, minus the modern adjuncts of cheap amusement. Swarms of men and women were walking about that crowded ground. They were selling, buying, eating, or talking. An air of preoccupation, of intentness, was the leading characteristic of the sombre-clad, be-draggled pilgrims. They bought and fed themselves only as a means to the one end which, as a beacon from afar, had shed a glamour over all the raw, rough places and experiences through which they had passed to come hither.

Here a flapping, ragged piece of canvas supported by three slender poles gave shelter to a native Arab, eager and vociferous in bargaining for the highest rates for the flat round loaves he was presenting to the public gaze. On the other side of the crowded thoroughfare, self-constituted by wayfarers between river-bank and plain, was a long narrow tent of patched white canvas, open to the air at one end, with seats inside where people could shelter from wind and rain. Nearer the river was a circular hut with plaster walls and mud-domed roof, built on piles strongly embedded in the soil. This was a fixture on the bank, built after this fashion to guard against overflow of the river. As the way widened, vendors of rosaries, Greek crosses of wood, tawdry coloured prints of sacred subjects, and various nick-nacks of olive-wood, had spread out their rugs and laid out their wares on all sides. They appealed in loud voices to the people, who all carried some souvenir in their hands.

Up and down the ground swelled and contracted, muddy and wet and slippery. High on the right was a large booth pallisaded like a cage. The interior was half filled with pilgrims who had sheltered there during the night. On lower ground and peering round the corner was an ordinary tent ornamented with red shields of cloth.

Now the river was in view, a full, swift brown current. A few yards from the shore there was a long, thick rope stretched over the surface of the water parallel with the bank. It was tethered at one end to the small wharf,

and at other places to poles standing out of the water. Directly opposite the bathing-place was a steam-launch. To this was fastened a smaller launch, and in the space between these and the bank rocked sundry small boats. The whole of this area of water was enclosed by a rope barrier to prevent outsiders from making it a water highway.

The opposite bank of the river was steep, dropping directly to the stream below. On the edge above were seated a row of Turkish beys and effendis who had stayed in Jericho for the express purpose of witnessing this Christian ceremony, so curiously opposed to their dignified notions of decorum. Willowy foliage lined the banks, clumps of tall feathery reeds waved in obedience to the spirit of the south-west wind, subdued and tempered in this low stratum of the Jordan valley.

Turning round to gaze at the throng of people, densest in the vicinity of the boats, the eye went straight to a Bedawin tent where, under the deep shade of its black-brown walls of woven goat-hair, were stacked piles of mellow golden-hued oranges, trays of figs and nuts, dried raisins and almonds. Here and there thick wreaths of blue smoke curled skyward from fires whose flames, pale and ghostly in the daylight, licked the sides of huge black cauldrons filled to the brim with water of an opaque, soupy appearance. Jordan water was in process of sterilisation for the purpose of filling the cans and bottles of pilgrims who were eager to convey the sacred fluid to the distant homeland.

Groups of Bedawin in their brown-and-grey abbais

squatted here and there on the ground or around the fires. Striplings with dark daring faces, their brilliant-hued, sleeveless coat hanging over cotton pants tied below the knee, or over the long loose kambaz of striped pattern in blue and white, red and gold, or plain colours, stalked round, holding bundles of long reeds cut for sale among the pilgrims. Boys of all ages ran and pushed their way eager to earn a kabak or a matelik, to sell or to beg at one of the grand occasions of their lives for making a precarious livelihood. "Haji! Backsheesh!" was as usual the favourite cry, or else an exorbitant demand for the cheapest of nothings.

Northward an extraordinary scene was in progress. In and between the shrubs and trees the people had scattered, making numberless tracks within short distance of the water. Hanging on all the available branches were the outstretched arms and legs and bodies of every variety of snow-white garment, as though spread out to air, or dry, during the temporary reign of the noonday sun after the desperate rainpour of the stormy night. People were sitting in rows close to the river-bank, and in groups between the trodden brushwood.

Here was a family circle in the shelter of a leafy crescent, formed of thin branches which they had woven into a temporary screen for their backs. They had a small tin saucepan into which they were dipping their spoons and knives to fish up bits of meat and bread floating in a cold watery mixture. The man was shaggy-bearded, long haired, unkempt, and of dogged mien. His fur-banded cap was between his knees. He wore

a paletot, belted and short, green, nay mildewy, with wear and damp. His women-folk were of square build with stolid faces. A black shawl tied over the parted brown hair, a short jacket, a full-gathered skirt showing feet and sturdy calves, wound round and round with strips of calico ; this was the ordinary attire of the female Russian pilgrim. The group was a sample of dozens, all similarly busied and pre-occupied.

Others had stretched themselves on the damp ground behind a bush, and were slumbering as soundly as if reposing in the softest and warmest of beds. Careworn, haggard, strained faces were visible on all sides, but more marked than any physical effect of fatigue and hardship was the universal air of triumphant expectancy. The brink of the climax had been attained, the climax towards which all had pressed with stoical suppression of bodily needs and suffering.

Strings of pilgrims continued to arrive, threading between the thinly leaved shrubs, peering everywhere for a spot where they could rest, and change their travel-stained garbs for the spotless garments folded in sack or bundle slung over their back.

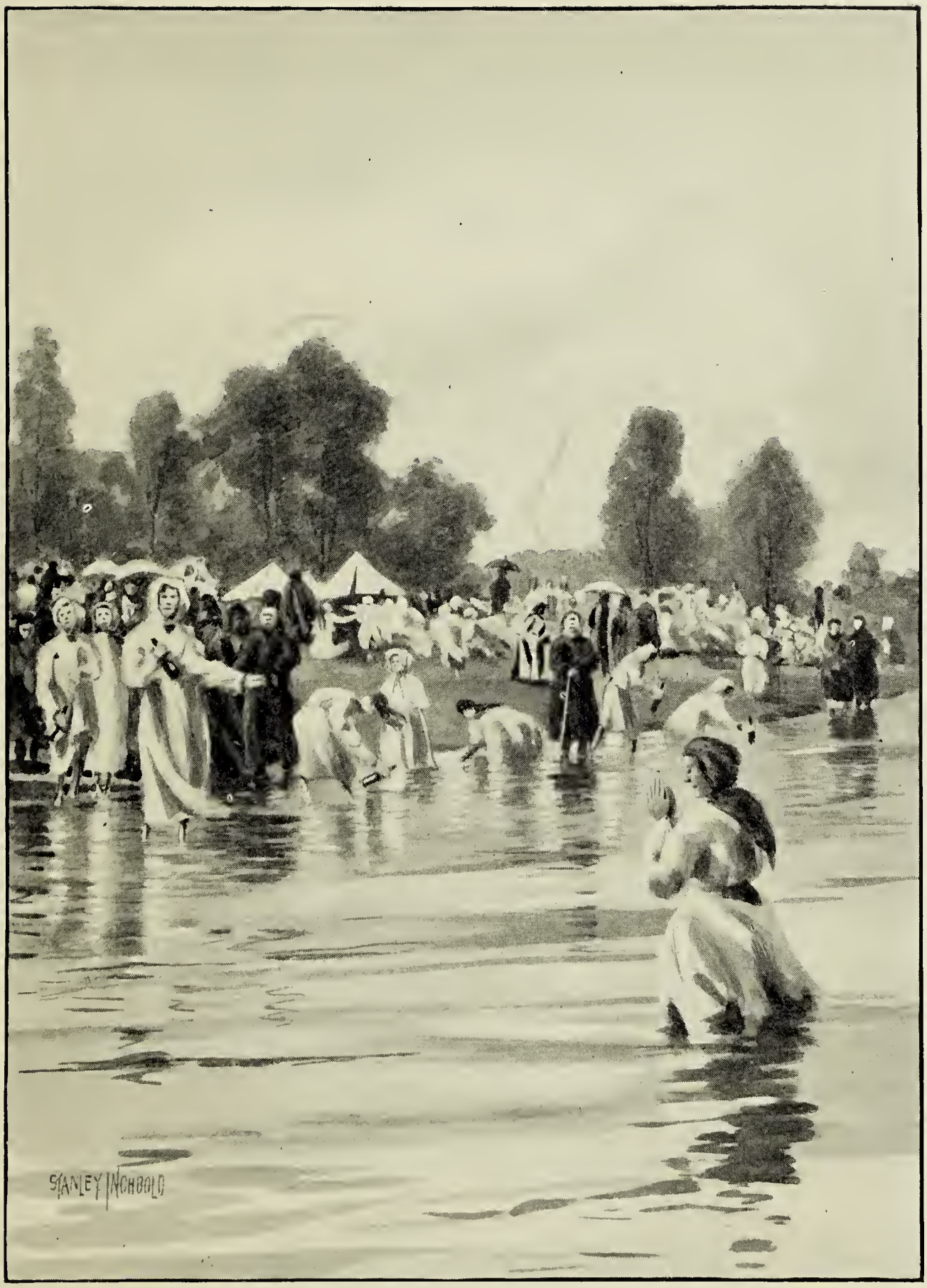
Four bearded men filed by, not one of them under sixty years of age, bending under their burdens, leaning on thick staves higher than their heads. Their hair was long and bushy, their beards iron-grey or white, dishevelled and abundant. Rugged and broad were their features ; of a clear, child-like blue their eyes. Endurance displayed itself in the sinewy knotted limbs, in the bowed shoulders, in the taut grip of swollen knuckles upon the

long staves ; it looked forth dumbly through the patient, half-suffering, half-aggressive eyes. These men sat down by a bedraggled clump of tamarisk, and, taking off their astrakan-brimmed hats, made the sign of the cross before beginning to unload their burdens and take a rude meal.

There were women who smiled happily in the faces of passers-by, uttering a sentence of greeting that sounded of kindly purport though in the Russian tongue. A few of them were rosy, round-faced, of sturdy build. Others were painfully attenuated and worn. They were of all ages, though the majority of them were women between forty and sixty.

In and out, like tropical birds of strange plumage, darted the native figures, always selling, always begging. Many of the pilgrims were changing their clothes, thinking naught of the gaze of others, so thoroughly were they engrossed in the purpose for which they donned the garments of white. A few of the women hung skirts and jackets on the interwoven shrubs to essay concealment of the process of transformation into vestal purity of array for the sacred plunge. On the banks figures in white were already waiting for the critical moment. As the hour advanced stir and movement quickened. The air of suspense intensified, the hurry became feverish.

Near the wharf the crowd thickened. It was difficult to pass through. A touch here and a touch there to make way as one head peered over the other, while on the rising ground up to the trellised booth were rows of men and women, slipping into their shrouds as



RUSSIAN PILGRIMS AT THE JORDAN.

quickly as their fingers could move. Across the end of the little landing-stage a boat was drawn up, and into this we stepped, and were rowed to the launch drawn up in the middle of the river.

A wonderful sight spread out before the gaze upon looking back to the shore. From the booth northward for some hundreds of yards, and a hundred yards at least to the south, treble, and, in some instances, quadruple rows of white-clad pilgrims stood shoulder to shoulder close to the water's edge. Here and there in the heat of religious fervour several had advanced knee-deep into the river, and were standing with ecstatic mien awaiting the ceremony of consecration. Among these white figures stood individual cases of nude figures. Did this condition indicate an extremity of poverty or an excess of devotional fervour, bordering upon religious mania? Behind this multitude in white was a dense crowd of spectators and other pilgrims, whose immersion was to take place at the midnight ceremony of the same day. Every available spot had been utilised for vantage-ground by the lithe-limbed Arabs. They had climbed the trees, swarmed up the poles of the long booth, and were swinging over the branches which composed the roof.

A wave of movement stirred the packed crowd as the priests who were to perform the ceremony came into view one by one at the end of the wharf. Four of them were in gorgeous canonicals. The others wore their ordinary cassock and high black mitre. They entered the boat in company with a few Russians in secular garb. In the hand of one was carried a long wand headed

with three artificial roses placed in the form of a cross. Every one of them stood upright in the boat, which was then pushed a yard away from the wharf. The boat was so crowded as to appear in danger of an upset.

The Greek Bishop was attired in a magnificent purple vestment bordered with gold bands embroidered in delicate flowers. In his hand he held a long golden cross. Two other priests of high official position supported on their shoulders flowing vestments of brocaded silk, which was white, figured with pink, green, and gold flowers. A priest in blue carried a painted panel in his arms representing the baptism of Christ.

For a quarter of an hour the chanting in Greek of voices on the boat was varied with responses from the shore, sung by priests of the Russian Church. Their voices were melodious though somewhat nasal, and the harmonies pleasing when all united in the chants. The singing alternated with the reading aloud of portions of the Scriptures. Every priest performed his share of the service. No other sound fell on the ear except at one interval when the prattle and singing of a child penetrated from the crowd, and blended with the monotonous chanting of the priest. No motion was made by the waiting pilgrims. They stood with bated breath, eyes intent, their mien absorbed, devout. All seemed emptied of self-consciousness, in order to throw their whole being into the approaching ceremonial action.

Suddenly the voices of the priests ceased from chanting. The Bishop in purple vestment bent over the edge of the boat and dipped the golden cross into the

water, uttering a formula of words. Simultaneous with this action gun-shots were fired into the air.

With the first of these signals the white-clothed figures moved. With one action as it were—in the same instant of time, they flung themselves into the water. Their heads quickly emerged, dripping and gasping. Some of the pilgrims were still in the water, others were bending for a second plunge, while others took the accustomed three dips rapidly. There were many clasping the rope with taut grip as if struggling with an unexpected foe encountered in the icy sting of the rain-swollen Jordan, into which torrents from snowy northern heights had poured their freezing waters.

It was an intensely pathetic sight. The child-like faith, the simplicity of belief in the commanding traditions of their Church, were so intense, so profound, so clear of alloy, that the effect was sublime. It was a sight for angels to weep at.

Ecstatic smiles wreathed the faces contorted still from the sudden contact with Jordan's chilly flood. A man who had stood without any ceremonial garment dipped his bare body and head boldly beneath the surface with fierce decision of action, once, twice, thrice. Then dripping and streaming from every limb he shrank back upon the crowd, which immediately opened and concealed him from view. Exposure of limb was inevitable. Women hastily drew down the clinging skirts, or pulled over their bare bosoms the modest jacket which the swift current had drawn up over their heads.

Directly opposite the launch a young curly-bearded

Russian had stood erect and motionless in a loose suit of white. His face had been set and severe, his expression ecstatic as a saint at the stake. He performed the threefold immersion once, only to repeat it with increased fervour and energy as though for the benefit of an absent friend. Some of the people had held souvenirs in their hands to which the consecrating waters would add peculiar virtue. One woman held a painted cross, a bunch of herbs, and a rosary, of which every bead was a tear when it emerged glistening from the wave.

North and south white figures continued to walk like somnambulists into the river, and plunge with desperate resolve beneath the surface. On the shore many pilgrims were dressing again in their ordinary garb, and all the bushes were being decked with the garments of white hanging out to dry in the wind and fitful sunshine.

And the sunshine overhead was reflected in every face. Beaming satisfaction prevailed in spite of pinched nostrils and chattering teeth between blue lips. Throngs of compatriots, whose time of immersion was to come twelve hours later, watched, talked, and walked from one spot to the other, filling bottles with Jordan water, still buying rosaries, crosses, souvenirs of cedar-wood, and mother-of-pearl, sticks of the sacred reeds, testing the quality of Arab bread, stowing handfuls of dearly bought figs and raisins in the deep pouches of their paletots or ample skirts. Everywhere prevailed the stir and commotion created by a vast multitude who abide, eat, and sleep at a long distance from any living

Russian Pilgrims returning from the Jordan.

habitation. The majority of those who remained for the night would shelter in the monastery of St. John, like sardines in a box in court, corridors, or guest-rooms. And for this accommodation they would all give offerings to the Church that would shame the conscience of many a complacent Churchman at home. Many remained that night on the river-bank.

Early next morning they all trudged back to the village of Jericho. The rain had fallen in torrents during the night. The mud on the route was ankle, nay, in some parts, knee-deep. The clayey soil dragged on the feet like lead.

On they came towards Jericho, a black stream of moving figures. Weary, back-bent pilgrims, though purified by Jordan baptism, still undergoing all the cruel hardships consequent upon the distressful penury of all oppressed peasantry. Hope had sustained them on the pilgrimage towards the river of their faith, but black and stormy loomed the goal of the return journey to their homes. Dogged endurance, the fatal heritage of centuries of serfdom, planted every weary step in the footmarks of hundreds that had passed before.

They were splashed with mud from head to foot. Boots appeared to be cased in overshoes of caked earth. Some of the women sat on the ground by the Wadi Kelt, took off their boots or shoes and washed them and their feet in the running water. Then they slung the soaking footgear over their shoulders and walked on barefooted. Many had worn their boots into so many holes that soles separated from vamps and had to

be abandoned by the wayside Others who had worn sandals and shoes of plaited parti-coloured straw were forced to discard them on the march.

At the entrance to the village, half facing the plain where the rambling road dwindled to a narrow lane flanked with hedges of piled thorn-branches, stood the Russian hospice. It was a rectangular building with a second story, round which stretched a wide terrace formed by the roof of the ground floor. The doors stood wide open. Passing in and out was a motley throng of pilgrims, some arriving, others taking leave. Lining the outside wall under the barred windows were huckster-stands supporting bread, dried fruits, and nuts, for which the Arabs were asking of the hungry crowd exorbitant prices.

On the other side of the slushy, trampled thoroughfare opposite the hospice doors, the ground rose into a bank, topped by the thorny hedge which guarded the huts of the village of Jericho from intrusion of strangers or direct attack of jackals. This bank was lined with footsore, tired people. They squatted on its slimy, moist surface and sipped tea, watery soup, or nibbled at pieces of bread.

The space between hospice and bank was blocked by the passage of freight donkeys and pedestrians. Motley packs were borne by the beasts; men and women sat astride on their worldly goods, the inevitable pouch on their back, in one arm a bundle of reeds, and always a kettle in the hand. There were scores of these riders who came slowly up to the hospice, and

either alighted or passed wearily on. But the majority of the pilgrims were on foot. Very few seemed to pay heed to their neighbours, so great was their absorption in personal difficulties and fatigue.

Shouting in their native tongue, bargaining and pushing, imperative in their manner of compelling progress or insisting upon a halt, the noisiest of all were the numerous Arab muleteers and guides, who themselves looked shivering and bedraggled as cockatoos after a storm of rain. They were hungry too, and of whatever meal their patrons partook they expected, even demanded, a share, which the Russians never hesitated to give them. Everywhere, except in a narrow bit of the lane left for traffic, the exhausted people sat down and rested, on scraps of boxes, on their bundles, or on the bare earth.

Within the building every room and passage of the ground floor was filled. Right and left out of the lewan running the width of the house into the garden behind were long rooms wherein sat, stood, and reposed people in every posture of fatigue; the only furniture consisted of long mats and mattresses stretching on the floor in every direction. Here had rested during the night numerous pilgrims who had returned to Jericho late on the previous day. Many were still lying full length on the ground in deep slumber of exhaustion. Others were just awake, some performing a meagre toilet, while others fumbled in their cotton bags for a mouthful of food to stay the pangs of a prolonged fast. In the hall were some benches against the walls, and a couple of long wooden tables. At these were seated

such fortunate pilgrims as could pay a minimum charge for a cup of coffee and breakfast of austere description. Longing eyes glanced sideways from many a passer-by, but there was no begging of any sort, even from the poorest of the pilgrims.

In the garden behind were open spaces under the trees, but building in process, with débris of stones, mortar, clay, and pools of rain-water, gave an impression of squalid discomfort, of damp and cold. Notwithstanding, there were groups of uncomplaining people sitting under the trees on the unused blocks and heaps of stones. Two big fires were burning a little distance from the house and cauldrons of water stood over them. Here sat a white-bearded man with shaggy rimmed cap and belted jacket, green with age, while he munched eagerly at a native loaf and a few dried figs. His legs were strapped with mud-streaked calico, his rough shoes sodden with wet and mud.

Back again to the front of the hospice. Tramp, tramp, still they streamed in numbers up over that dreary plain. Now it was a string of women, and behind their wearily trudging figures filed some donkeys with women more fortunate sitting astraddle on their baggage. A shout, a cry rose from the muleteer. The women in front tried to struggle out of the way, all but one bent, muffled figure that marched steadily forward, staff in hand, directly in the donkey-track. A scream, a thud, and down she fell into the mud, caught in the side by the projecting baggage as the beast tried to pass in obedience to its owner's fierce prod from behind.

The woman on the donkey passed on with never a look behind ; the women who followed passed on. A stare or a look of stolid indifference was the only portion of the prostrate pilgrim. She picked herself out of the dirt, shook her short skirt, and limped to one side talking shrilly, while no one took any heed. As the last of the train of donkeys passed she turned with a spurt of anger and struck at it fiercely with the staff in her hand.

On the other hand when a woman, carrying a linen bag, dropped it into the mud, and the string snapped, scattering the contents—kettle, cup, food, clothing, rosary, cross—other women crowded round and helped to pick them up, while, with flushed cheeks and glittering eyes, she talked volubly on the subject of the mishap.

And this was but the first stage on the homeward journey after the attainment of the desire of a lifetime. Is the object of the pilgrimage worth the difficulties and keen suffering attendant upon its acquisition ? Put the question to any individual of that forlorn-looking crowd, and he will answer "Yes," even though in traversing the rough places of that Via Dolorosa the effort should cost him his life. If he survives, why then when the hour comes later for the knotted fingers to be clasped quietly over the breast, for the rugged features to be set in the mask of eternal sleep, for the body to be garbed in the treasured white shroud, those virtues attained by immersion in holy Jordan will help the soul of the dying to pass in peace and safety through the waters of the river of Death.

O peasants of Russia, great is your faith! It is at once your blessing and your curse. It is the chain which has bound and still binds you to the wheel of a remorseless tyranny. It is the star which sheds a ray of light into the blackness of your lives. Earth's rejected—God's elected—O beata beatorum!

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE EXPERIENCES OF THE ARTIST

TOLD BY HIMSELF

THE traveller who spends but a few weeks in Syria of necessity is compelled to return to his native country with but a hazy memory even of what he has actually seen, while any opinions which he may have formed concerning the customs of the people must be kaleidoscopic or enveloped in fog.

As I had the good fortune to remain nearly two years in Palestine without even leaving the country during the hot season, some of the difficulties and experiences I encountered in obtaining material for the illustrations which appear in this work it may be interesting to relate here.

Some of the chief difficulties naturally suggest themselves, such as the great heat, and the ignorance of the Arabic language, to say nothing of the dust, and the glare of the sun that burns by day; yet there are other difficulties which soon discover themselves.

A few days after arriving in Jerusalem I determined that, cost what it may, I must speak the language. Therefore, without delay I set to work, and at the end of four or five months was easily able to arrange

everything with the natives in their own tongue, and was thus independent of a dragoman, as well as being at liberty to move about with absolute freedom.

There are difficulties other than those above alluded to, such as the command which forbids any of the followers of the Prophet to allow him or herself to be sketched or painted, to say nothing of the fact that the faces of the women are veiled in most instances. A sufficient knowledge of the Arabic tongue, added to a judicious bestowal of backsheesh, constituted an almost sure "open sesame" to the good graces of the natives. In about six months' time I was regarded by them as "ibn-el-blad," a son of the country, and thus escaped many difficulties, even if the knowledge of the language of my adopted country did occasionally bring loss of time and vexation of spirit.

On one occasion at Jaffa, when I managed to keep at bay half a dozen young street arabs, a knowledge of the language was my undoing.

I was busy at work in the streets just at the very hour when a number of men who were leaving their work of orange-packing drew near. They soon learnt from the boys that I spoke their language, and immediately began to ply me with all manner of questions, as to how long I had been in the country, why I came, when I was going, whatever was the good of painting pictures, and a score of other questions came tumbling from their lips as they themselves literally tumbled against me and my work, rendering satisfactory results impossible.

In vain I said, "Now that the evening hour has come your work is done, but mine begins, for it is too hot to paint in the daytime." I begged them to come and see the progress made by the next evening. Soon there were forty or fifty jabbering on all sides and purposely obstructing the point of view; while a small percentage were bent on making fun out of the situation.

In order to see what I was doing some actually interposed their own heads between mine and my easel; others stood absolutely in front of me, then turned their heads upside-down and pretended to examine my work in the same manner as their comrades. I was not long in deciding that it was a hopeless situation, especially as groups of newcomers continued to pass that way, so I quickly packed up and walked off amid the jeers of my onlookers, although one or two with whom I walked back to the town were most sympathetic.

It goes without saying that the most difficult task of accomplishment was to sketch the women. Here it was that the knowledge of their language, coupled with a prodigious amount of coaxing and the all-powerful backsheesh, were mighty agents in attaining the desired object of sketching them.

At Jericho, where I spent two winters, I became so well known to the natives for several miles round that often the women, who previously passed me with their faces smothered up with the long sleeves of their gowns, would go so far as to stop me, expose their

faces freely and request me to sketch them, or, as many imagined, photograph them. Great was their surprise when instead of waiting a second or two for a snap-shot, they found at the end of twenty minutes that I had not finished. Some would walk away disgusted, anger flashing in their eyes. Others, unaccustomed to remain in one position beyond a few minutes, would sink down on the ground as if overcome. In such an instance I seized the opportunity of making another note in a recumbent position, till at last, discovering my tactics, the girl jumped up and furiously demanded further backsheesh, at the same time keeping herself in perpetual motion in order to defeat my object.

Another Jericho woman with whom I had arranged a sitting at two francs an hour (a really large amount for such a model) not only came an hour late, but after five minutes said she was tired, and demanded then and there payment for the whole time. However, not until I had struggled to accomplish something in half an hour did I let her go, paying the two francs in despair, not on account of her threats, but with an eye to future work amongst members of her tribe.

Once I agreed to pay a certain house, if such it may be called, so much for the privilege of sketching it, and duly set to work. Now in this house several families lived together, including men and women, old and young, and several children, together with goats and chickens when the latter felt so inclined.

JERICHO WOMEN AT HOME.

Owing to the effect of light chosen, I could not work many hours together, and therefore had to return day after day in order to obtain my ends. Often, as otherwise, the particular models I required were absent or refused to sit unless I paid in advance.

One young woman about eighteen years of age confidently told me that she wanted money because her husband was dead, and as she had a baby she volunteered to keep the rest of the household in order; and then she knowingly looked at me. Of course I knew what she wanted, and promised her backsheesh for herself, over and above the amount I had agreed to pay into the general house fund.

At the end of several mornings' work, one or the other of this truly numerous household would advance towards me, shrieking out for *masari*, *i.e.* money earned, as opposed to backsheesh, which is money given. Naturally, as my work was unfinished, I refused, telling them that they should receive it to-morrow. Oh! that word "bookra"! It is the most soothing that any one can use; for no sooner did I say, "To-morrow," than each and all retired satisfied. But with successive to-morrows even *bookra* began to lose its charm, and then it was that I appealed to my dusky widow, and reminded her of her promise to see that I was not molested. So peace reigned for that morning at least.

The next day I played alternately the game of *bookra* and appeal to the little widow, who, as fast as the different members of the household came frantically screaming towards me demanding *masari*, sent them back with such

rapidity that the whole front of the house was like the top of a Jack-in-the-box. Between each vehement demand for *masari* I plied my brush, and shouted, "Beseer masari bookra." The next day, however, that word was powerless to work a charm on their thirsty spirits. When at last my little widow turned faithless and deserted to the enemy, I decided to throw up the sponge. The deserter is seen in the picture facing this page with a red handkerchief tied round her head.

One of the most tantalising experiences with the Jericho Arabs concerned not only their unpunctuality (an hour being quite a common delay), but their sudden departure almost immediately after arrival. Some kind of superstitious dread seemed to seize hold of them, and they became quite possessed, as it were, for the time being. Their eyes flashed defiance, while they urgently declared that they must go at once.

"Why?"

"Oh, I have some work to do."

"Nonsense, it is too hot for work and is much cooler here," said I.

Yet off they went, neither venturing to ask for payment, nor yet to suggest backsheesh.

I often wondered whether it was the fixedness of the artist's eye that unnerved them, or the consciousness that the Prophet himself was not only displeased with them, but was also gazing upon them as well as the khowaja.

One Arab boy, after remaining fairly tranquil for five or ten minutes, began to writhe and twist like a

serpent, and as usual declared that he was forced to go. Nothing on earth that I could suggest would alter his decision, not even the doubling of his *masari*.

"Well! no *masari* at all for you," I said.

"I don't care," quickly came the answer.

"But you agreed to come for an hour."

"What does that matter? I can't stay, I have some work to do," and away he went without any payment at all.

A fortnight after my arrival in Palestine, I went down to Jericho, where also arrived a party of Turkish officials at the same time. Through the medium of French we were soon on a friendly footing. This party consisted of the Mayor of Jerusalem, the judge, and another official. The latter proposed a visit to a Bedawin sheikh's tent, who, by the way, was a blood-relation.

We soon found the encampment and discovered the old sheikh reclining on a bed of stones, which had afterwards been covered with small twigs. On the top of this was a covering of camel's-hair. All the women had discreetly withdrawn to a neighbouring tent, and it was not long before the usual Arab hospitality was evident.

One of the men began to prepare coffee for us by grinding the berries in a rudely shaped wooden mortar, using for the purpose a pestle made of the same material.

Before doing this, however, he raked together with a stick what appeared to be wood-ash, and then laid three or four delicate twigs together, supporting one another in the shape of a pyramid. Next, bending down,

he gently blew on these same ashes, again adding three or four more small twigs. Ere many seconds had passed, the smoking embers had given place to a small flaming fire. He continued to add pieces of wood, always building in a pyramidal shape till the fire was strong enough to burn boughs an inch or two in diameter. Since that day I have never failed, at the first attempt, to kindle a fire in the open.

In a quarter of an hour we were drinking delicious Arab coffee which, with an admixture of sugar, had been boiled fast for several minutes in Damascus metal pots. It is an insult to compare our own pretence of coffee-making with the full-flavoured aroma of Arab coffee, though I have more than once seen it stated by our own writers that coffee should not only be infused but well boiled into the bargain.

The old sheikh in whose tent we received this hospitality often used to visit our hotel, and was a clever hand at chess. Newcomers generally faced him at the game, but always with disastrous results.

Talking of chess, I may say that our expression "check mate" is from Eastern sources, the Persian "shah mât," as well as the Arabic "sheikh mayeet" both meaning the head or king is dead. It is easy to see how our "check mate" is but a corruption of the above.

Another word that interested me was our English word "admiral." I often wondered why the French spelt the word "amiral," without the letter *d*, and in a truly patriotic spirit felt that somehow we must be

BEDAWI PREPARING COFFEE.

right. The words Emir-el-bahr signify an emir or prince of the sea. We have only to drop the last word "sea" and we get our English word "admiral" and the still more properly derived "amiral" of the French.

One great advantage I derived from a knowledge of the language was that I could dispense with a dragoman, which was a great relief, though I always had my boy Josef and a donkey to accompany me on long expeditions, the heat being too great either to walk or carry my own sketching paraphernalia.

During these sketching expeditions I seized the opportunities and learned more Arabic from Josef, and in return taught him French. All dragomen I did not find satisfactory, though the ignorance of the language at first compelled me to employ one.

On one occasion soon after my arrival I drove to the Jordan in the carriage of a Syrian dragoman who spoke very good French. After an hour or two's work my man said we should have to return as he had no fodder for his horses.

"But I want to do some work; I cannot waste half the day in going backwards and forwards," I said somewhat hastily.

"But, monsieur, the horses won't be able to take us back without food."

"Well then, you must get them food."

"Not possible," was the reply.

However I made him go to a monastery about half a mile distant and he soon found some. Then I managed

some work, though the dragoman was minus three or four hours of Arabian night's yarns in the courtyard of the Jericho hotel.

In Jerusalem particularly my troubles were many, especially in connection with the numerous visits I made to the Temple Area, the mosque of Omar being my sketching objective.

Although able to dispense with a dragoman, by command of the Turkish Government I was saddled with a soldier, who accompanied me every time I went to the Temple Area, in spite of the fact that my donkey-boy, a youth of sixteen, generally came with me to carry my sketching apparatus. In addition to paying my boy, I had also to give backsheesh to the soldier, and thus indirectly I contributed to the pay of the Sultan's army, which is generally so much in arrears. Moreover I was expected to pay one mejîdi (4*s.* 2*d.*) to the sheikh of the Temple Area every time I entered.

One can stand with equanimity paying one's donkey-boy, together with the soldier and the sheikh of the Temple Area, for the privilege of sketching one of the most beautiful buildings in the world; all these payments can be cheerfully disbursed. When, however, in order to squeeze still more out of one, you are denied an entrance unless you supplement the official backsheesh agreed upon with the authorities at the serai, one's equilibrium begins to give way at the resultant loss of time, especially when an official permit to enter is presented at the gate.

One morning I showed the Government permit to

enter to the sheikh at the gate. Entrance was refused on the ground that the permit was not in order. I at once perceived that an extra mejîdi all round would have solved the difficulty, and that to have adopted this plan would have been fatal, for the same game would have been played upon me every time with increasing severity.

"Then I must go to the serai and see what is wrong," I said, and trudged back, accompanied by my boy and the soldier in the June heat, which even then at 7 a.m. was great.

I arrived at the serai only to find that everything was in order. Although I lost a full hour through gaining my point, ever afterwards I obtained entrance without difficulty.

On returning home, however, about 11 a.m. my soldier tried yet another game, saying that the bimbashi (officer) at the serai also expected one mejîdi for backsheesh.

"Oh, does he?" I replied; "how many more are there who want backsheesh, and who is this particular bimbashi?"

"The big bimbashi," replied the man unabashedly.

"Then let the 'bimbashi kebir' come for it to-morrow himself," I quickly retorted. "I should like to see him." At the same time I expressed the wish to finish my walk alone. Needless to say the "bimbashi kebir" was a myth.

On a future occasion I climbed the walls of Jerusalem alone and planted myself on the top of the Damascus Gate,

flattering myself that there I should be far from the madding crowd. Alas! a soldier from the guard-house espied me, and soon one of his comrades put in an appearance, ostentatiously handling his bayonet at the same time.

In this situation I thought it better not to show any knowledge of the language, and pegged away with my work. By degrees the man drew nearer and nearer, till at last he stood before me and demanded backsheesh, saying that I had no right to be on the walls. At length he squatted by my easel and signified his intention that I should have to go, or else give him backsheesh, the while patting my pocket, saying, "Feloos, feloos" (money, money).

I shook my head, uttering at the same time the negation, "Mafeesh."

"Fee feloos," reiterated the soldier, feeling my pockets with his hands, "fee feloos, khowaja."

"No," I repeated, making signs that my pockets were empty, a precaution I had learned to adopt; for besides a few copper coins and an unloaded revolver my pockets were void.

"Yes, you have money," persisted the warrior, with sardonic grin, patting anew my empty purse.

Still I paid no heed, but continued working away and mentally prepared a good volley of words to shoot at my persecutor at the proper time. This occurred in a few minutes, when, after nudging my arm several times and demanding money, the fellow impudently closed my colour-box and would have taken it and demanded

money for its return, had it not been that it was securely fastened round my thumb.

Suddenly I jumped up, holding my colour-box out of his reach, and ordered him to be off, adding that I lived in the country, had friends at the serai, and advised him to leave me alone at once.

It was more amusing to witness than describe the way the fellow slunk off. The next day when I again passed the military guard to mount these same walls by myself, one of the soldiers escorted me to the top of the gate by an easier, and to me as yet an undiscovered way.

On another occasion outside the walls of Jerusalem near a Moslem cemetery which was entered by a small wooden gate, two Arabs obstructed my path and demanded the usual thing. Taught by experience I refused, retreated a few paces, brought my sketching umbrella and the sharp-pointed pole attached to it down to the charge and ran at the men. They both decamped, and I went through the door with colours flying.

Several years in California and amongst the Red Indians had taught me that determined action was necessary, and above all no show of fear on such occasions.

One afternoon, perceiving a flock of goats outside the Damascus Gate resting, unattended by the goatherd, I embraced the opportunity to make a few notes in my sketch-book. Ere long the goatherd appeared, and of course demanded backsheesh.

"But why should I give you money for nothing?" I asked.

"Because you are drawing my goats."

"Well, it does not hurt them, does it?"

"They are my goats."

I did not reply, but continued my work. After keeping his hand wide open for several minutes that I might fill it, the man muttered some words against me, and moved off saying:

"All right, no backsheesh no goats," and then he set to work to keep the animals on the move so that I should accomplish nothing. But he unknowingly heaped coals of fire on my head, seeing that I much desired to sketch some goats in motion.

At first I was inclined to think that I was in the midst of barbarians, especially as the goats were at the goat-market, and I was a casual passer-by. I mentally contrasted Arab and English shepherds, much to the detriment of the former I fear, until I reflected on the opportunities of the one compared with those of the other.

Suddenly there flashed into my mind recollection of a similar experience in my own country, within the sound of the bells of six or eight churches. On that occasion I wanted no figures to disturb the scene. Unfortunately a farm hand began to rake up the hay without perceiving me. At length he discovered me at my painting and continued his work, though with an averted face. At last, jumping to the conclusion that I was sketching him (I wished him at Jericho), he walked off, saying, "I'm d—— if I'm going to help you make your living." Then I pitied this poor Arab and quickly arranged to

give him some money, obtaining in return some useful studies of his goats.

As before alluded to, the unpunctuality of the Arabs was most exasperating, a couple of hours after time being quite an ordinary occurrence. At Tiberias, on the other hand, my man would come hours before the appointed time.

I arranged with Sualim that he should come two hours after the sun—this being their only way of gauging time—which at that season of the year rose at 7 a.m., consequently I expected my man at 9 o'clock.

To my surprise at 7 a.m. I saw a donkey standing near the hotel and Sualim sitting on the steps.

"I told you to come two hours *after* the sun," said I, from my bedroom window. "How is it that you have come with the sun?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," was the nonchalant reply.

"How do you mean, it does not matter?" I queried. "You are only wasting time."

"Well, khowaja, you engaged me for the whole day, so what matters it if I come with the sun, even though I arranged to come two hours after it."

The scorching heat of the Syrian summer sun does not conduce to a good night's sleep. Moreover, the Arabs choose the night rather than the day for travelling, and always have a trick of camping for an hour's rest as near as they can to an hotel, be it native or otherwise.

As Tiberias is situated on the shore of the Sea of Galilee I went there for several weeks in the winter,

nursing the hope that there, at any rate, tranquil nights would fall to my lot.

Alas! there is no rest for the wicked, for a worse plague than itinerant Arabs took hold on me, viz. itinerant Jews. The latter, however, were perambulating, inside the hotel, up and down the stone corridor, and discussing excitedly with Arab visitors, until nearly three in the morning. The next night the same thing occurred, so the following morning I appealed to the landlord, who, after much indecision, promised it should not take place again.

Between eleven and twelve the following night, however, I was awakened by loud voices and marching and counter-marching up and down the corridor. As this was evidently to be the order of the night I partially dressed and opened my door, only to see through the wide-open door of the bedroom opposite a bevy of Arabs and Jews.

I asked an Arab leaning against the entrance to the room what they were all doing. He waved his hand to a Jew who was sitting at a table surrounded by papers and documents.

"Monsieur," he replied in French, "we are engaged in business connected with a new Jewish colony near Safed."

"But surely you need not turn every night into day," I remonstrated, remarking at the same time that a little consideration was due to the visitors at the hotel, who paid for the privilege of resting by night as well as being fed by day.

This son of Israel declared that the business would be finished that self-same night. When, however, the same pantomime again took place the following night in spite of another appeal to the landlord, I determined by any means, legitimate or otherwise, to put an end to the nuisance. Between 1 and 2 a.m. the next morning I dressed, entered unasked the "bureau de commerce," and reminded the Jew of his promise. Then I marshalled several Arabs out of the room and shut the office door. Turning round, I espied a flickering light at the end of the corridor, went off in pursuit, and overtook a girl with a small lighted candle in her hand.

She proved to be one of the staff of the hotel, and on being asked what she was doing at that hour of the morning prowling about the passage and the hotel door wide open, she replied, "I have to let the men in on business when they come, monsieur." At that moment another Arab walked into the hotel and was proceeding to the "bureau de commerce," when I politely took him by the arm and escorted him outside. By these means I not only earned the gratitude of other visitors to the hotel, but also caused the business to go bankrupt ; for the next night the establishment closed its doors, though I heard that the company re-opened their doors in the native quarter of the town which abounds in Jews.

One of the strangest experiences, however, overtook me on a visit to the Temple Area. I may here state that a permit to enter this forbidden Moslem enclosure, though in itself a continuous one, does not obviate the

necessity of daily applying to the serai for the usual soldier to accompany one.

On this particular afternoon I applied to a bimbashi, who by this time was quite used to my visits. The officer informed me that if I would wait a few minutes till the commandant arrived a soldier should be provided.

After walking up and down for five or ten minutes, a soldier came up to me, saying, "Taal, khowaja," and he led the way to the Temple Area.

Soon I was hard at work, although I had not enjoyed more than ten minutes' study, when some one in the distance shouted, "Taal la hoen! taal la hoen!"[1]

Although I asked my escort what was the matter, he vouchsafed no satisfactory reply. Gradually a sergeant from the serai, who ceased not to shout "Taal la hoen!" drew near the spot where I was painting.

"You must stop your work, khowaja," he said angrily, and then vented his temper, which was at boiling point, upon my guard.

"Just you come back to the serai—I would not be in your place," he said, and thereupon struck the soldier in the face.

"Why do you strike me?" returned my escort with suppressed anger, whereupon he received several more blows from his superior. I must admit that though my escort was at fault, he behaved in a far more dignified way than his superior, who savagely turned on me—for I was continuing to make hay while the storm was

[1] It has been stated that the "Tally ho" of our huntsmen is taken from the Arab cry "Taal la hoen" (Come to here).

brewing—"If you don't stop your painting and come with me to the serai, I shall take your things from you," he said.

This time I scented something radically wrong, so wofully packed up my effects. I objected to go to the serai, declaring that it was not my business to decide anything in the matter.

The sergeant replied than the man had constituted himself as escort without permission, and that my presence was necessary at the serai in order to prove the case and secure the man's disciplinary punishment; so in order to avoid further discussion I consented to go.

Arrived in the room, I was not sorry that I had agreed to go with the sergeant, as I had an opportunity of assisting at a Turkish court-martial.

The bimbashi questioned me as to the fact of the soldier accompanying me, saying that he had gone of his own initiative in order to obtain some backsheesh—this wretched backsheesh again. Although I could see by the truly savage way one and all regarded the culprit that the bread of affliction and not backsheesh was to be his portion, I was bound to confess the truth, especially as he had been caught in the very act with me in the Temple Area.

When the court had heard the evidence, mine as well as that of the sergeant, the bimbashi—I wondered if he were the bimbashi kebir afore alluded to in this chapter—struck his prisoner with open hands several times on either cheek, while the sergeant, unfastening his waistbelt, deprived him of bayonet and scabbard.

This done, the bimbashi renewed the chastisement in the same manner, evidently imbued with the idea that discipline must be maintained. One of the blows thus savagely administered to the poor fellow caused his tarboosh to fall to the ground.

"Pick it up," yelled the bimbashi. His victim obeyed at once, but not before he had received a kick on the nether portion of his person as he stooped to the ground. As the man passed out of the room another bimbashi administered a parting kick from behind, and by so doing gave an outward expression to his inward acceptance of the mode of administering justice by his brother officer. Then the sergeant led the prisoner forth to his prison in the serai.

The following day I was stopped by the sergeant in one of the bazaars, and though I did not wish to know him, he obliged me to say that I did remember him, and actually asked for "backsheesh."

"Backsheesh! But what for?" I demanded in astonishment.

"Because I helped you yesterday afternoon."

With the remembrance of my lost afternoon still rankling in my mind, I passed on without offering any reply.

In the Lebanon district and amongst the Druse population, the difficulties were connected chiefly with the heat and dust. It was in Judæa proper where the most vexatious or amusing experiences were encountered.

Two or three miles from Jericho a goatherd

favoured me with criticisms on my work, saying it was wonderful.

"Certainly," said I. "How many goats will you give me for this picture?"

He reflected a moment or two and then replied, "I would not give you one goat for a thousand like it."

"But look at it and see how wonderful it is, as you say," I said.

The man took it in his hand, held it at arm's length, with the board so much askew that it was almost upside down, and repeated, "I would not give you one goat for a thousand like it."

During my first winter at Jericho, and before I could rely on any conversation in Arabic, I was sketching about a mile and a half outside the village, when a Bedawi on a white mare galloped up from behind and suddenly drew rein. After watching me for a few minutes the eternal word "Backsheesh" was uttered.

I shook my head and continued my work to the constant demands of "Backsheesh, backsheesh."

At length the man moved from my side and placed himself and horse in such a position as exactly to obstruct my point of view.

I confess as it was late in the evening, and as I had been but a few weeks in the country, I did not quite know what to do—so uncanny did the man appear in the fast gathering twilight.

When, however, he produced a revolver, and again demanded backsheesh, I suddenly rose, whipped off the cover of my sketching-stool, folded the tripod into

one thick stick, and waved it aloft, shouting out "Yellah," one of the few words in Arabic I at that time knew how to apply correctly.

It was not long before I had the satisfaction of seeing the white charger disappear in the direction of Jericho, and although I several times recognised both the mare and her rider during the next few days, for several reasons I allowed the matter to drop.

THE END

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